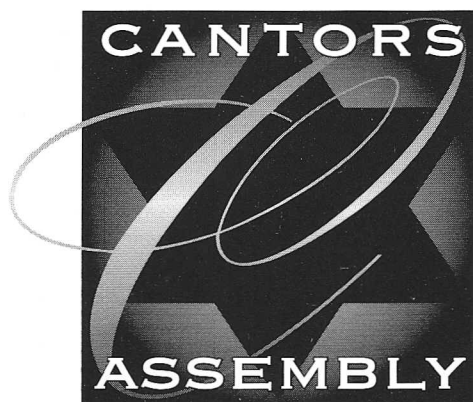


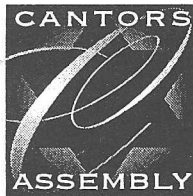
**Proceedings of the  
56th Annual  
Cantors Assembly  
Convention**



**“VOICES OF THE SPIRIT”**

**SUNDAY, MAY 11, 2003 – THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2003  
HILTON UNIVERSAL HOTEL • LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA**

Proceedings of the  
56<sup>th</sup> Annual  
Cantors Assembly  
Convention



May 11 – 15, 2003  
Hilton Los Angeles  
Universal City, CA

# CANTORS ASSEMBLY OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

July 1, 2002—June 30, 2003

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Vice President Administration: Steven Stoehr  
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Executive Administrator: Abraham B. Shapiro

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|                          |                             |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
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| Nathan Lam        | Kurt Silbermann    |
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| Solomon Mendelson | Larry Vieder       |
| Chaim Najman      | Isaac I. Wall      |

## **2003 Convention Planning Committee**

Hazzan Chayim Frenkel (Co-Chair)

Hazzan Joseph Gole (Co-Chair)

Hazzan Don Gurney (Co-Chair)

Hazzan Nathan Lam (Co-Chair)

Hazzan Nancy Abramson

Hazzan Jack Chomsky

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Hazzan Jeffrey Myers

Hazzan Chaim Najman

Hazzan Alisa Pomerantz-Boro

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Hazzan Lance Tapper

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Hazzan Greg Yaroslow (Co-Chair)

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Hazzan Henrique Ozur Bass

Hazzan Emanuel Perlman

Hazzan Jodi Sered-Lever

Hazzan Abraham B. Shapiro

Hazzan Shayna Smith

Hazzan Steven Stoehr

Mr. Jay Neufeld

## **2003 Convention Gabbaim**

Hazzan Ralph Goren

Hazzan Yehuda Keller

Hazzan Frank Lanzkron-Tamarazo

Hazzan Eva Robbins

Hazzan Judy Sofer

## **2003 Convention Accompanists**

Mr. Aryell Cohen

Ms. Tova Morcos-Kliger



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## **56<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the Cantors Assembly**

**Sunday, May 11 – Thursday, May 15, 2003**

**Hilton Hotel – Universal City**

### **Sunday, May 11th**

**11:00 am ..... Lobby Foyer**

Registration

Chairs: Ayelet Tours assisted by Hazzan Carey Cohen (Green Bay, WI) and  
Hazzan Lance Tapper (Bermuda Dunes, CA)

**12:00 pm ..... Hiro Room**

**Hospitality Room**

Refreshments will be available

Chair: Hazzan Mimi Haselkorn (Temple City, CA)

**12:00 pm**

**A. Tour of Skirball and Getty Museums ..... Hotel Main Entrance**

Chair: Ayelet Tours

**B. Visit City Walk and Universal City.....On Your Own**

**1:00 pm ..... Salon 6**

**A Composite of the Image of Cantor in Film:**

- The Jazz Singer – 1927 version (1:00 pm)
- Der Chazn's Zindel: The Cantor's Son starring Moshe Oysher (2:30 pm)
- The Image of Cantor in Cinema (3:45 pm)

Chair: Hazzan Nathan Lam (Los Angeles, CA)

**5:15 pm ..... Salon 6**

**Services:**

Mincha: Hazzan Josef Chazan (Mission Viejo, CA)

Ma'ariv: Hazzan Nancy Abramson (New York, NY)

Gabbai: Hazzan Eva Robbins (Los Angeles, CA)

**6:00 pm ..... Ballroom B-C**

**"The Many Cuisines of Los Angeles"** - An elaborate buffet dinner featuring Chinese, Italian, Japanese and International Cuisine

Hava Nashir: Hazzan Linda Kates (Los Angeles, CA) and the Stephen S. Wise Minyan Band

Birkat Hamazon: Hazzan Gregory Yaroslow (San Bernardino, CA)

Chairs: Hazzan Linda Kates (Los Angeles, CA) and Hazzan Alisa Pomerantz-Boro (San Diego, CA)

**7:30 pm ..... Ballroom D**

**Evening concert featuring "Shir Madness"** with Hazzanim Don Croll

(Dallas, TX) and David Propis (Houston, TX) and Cantor Kenny Ellis

(Agoura Hills, CA), and **"Vocolot"** with Hazzan Linda Hirschhorn

(San Leandro, CA)

Chairs: Hazzan Linda Kates (Los Angeles, CA) and Hazzan Alisa Pomerantz-Boro (San Diego, CA)

**9:00 pm ..... Outside Ballroom B-C**

**Dessert Buffet**

**9:30 pm ..... Hiro Room**

**Reception for New CA Members and First Time Attendees**

Chair: Hazzan Mimi Haselkorn (Temple City, CA)

## **Monday, May 12th**

**7:00 am ..... Sierra Room**

**Shacharit Traditional**

Ba'al T'fillah and Ba'al K'riah: Hazzan Alan Sokoloff (Mamaroneck, NY)

Gabbai: Hazzan Yehuda Keller (Lakewood, CA)

**7:00 am ..... Salon 6**

**Shacharit Egalitarian**

Ba'alat T'fillah: Hazzan Arlyne Unger (Erdenheim, PA)

Ba'alat K'riah: Hazzan Judy Sofer (Pasadena, CA)

Gabbai: Hazzan Eva Robbins (Los Angeles, CA)

**7:45 am ..... Sierra Room**



**D'var Neginah:** Hazzan Dr. Sholom Kalib (Farmington Hills, MI)  
**Chair:** Hazzan Chaim Najman (Southfield, MI)

**8:00 am .....Ballroom B**  
**Breakfast**

**8:30 am .....Lobby Foyer**  
**Registration**

**9:00 am .....Ballroom C**  
**"Visions for Klei Kodesh in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" - Rabbi Bradley Artson, Dean of the Ziegler School at the University of Judaism**  
**Chair:** Hazzan Sheldon Levin (Metuchen, NJ)

**10:30 am .....Ballroom D**  
**A Preview of the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music**, presented by Milken Family Foundation Chairman Lowell Milken, Executive Vice President Richard Sandler, and Dr. Neil W. Levin, Milken Archive Artistic Director. Featuring film and live performances.  
**Chair:** Hazzan Joseph Gole (Los Angeles, CA)

**12:00 pm .....Ballroom B-C**  
**Lunch**  
**Hava Nashir:** Hazzan Mike Stein (Woodland Hills, CA)  
**Birkat Hamazon:** Hazzan Perry Fine (South Orange, NJ)

**1:00 pm .....Ballroom D**

**"Precious Memories,"** featuring a trio of films from the Oral History Video Project of the Milken Archive, introduced by Dr. Neil W. Levin, Artistic Director of the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music.

- Conversations with Moshe Ganchoff
- A Century of Hazzanut and Hazzanim in Los Angeles
- A Revered Generation: Esteemed Cantors, Colleagues & Yiddish Actors in Retrospect

Chair: Hazzan Joseph Gole (Los Angeles, CA)

**2:30 pm .....Ballroom D**

**The Music of Los Angeles Composers and a Read-Through of New Publications.** Local Composers will be invited to join us and discuss their music, as well as lead us in a sing-through.

Chair: Hazzan Don Gurney (Los Angeles, CA)

**4:30 pm .....Ballroom D**

**Services:**

- Mincha: Hazzan Marcey Wagner (Old Brookville, NY)  
Ma'ariv: Hazzan Ofer Barnoy (Roslyn, NY)  
Gabbai: Hazzan Judy Sofer (Pasadena, CA)

**5:15 pm .....Ballroom B-C**

**Dinner**

- Birkat Hamazon: Hazzan Ralph Goren (Margate, NJ)  
Chair: Hazzan Chaim Najman (Southfield, MI)

**6:45 pm .....Hotel Main Entrance**

**Buses leave for Stephen S. Wise Temple**



**7:45 pm ..... Stephen S. Wise Temple**

**Evening Concert: "A Concert of Jewish Americana" featuring:**

- Hazzanim Ira Bigeleisen (Valley Village, CA), Herschel Fox (Encino, CA), Linda Kates (Los Angeles, CA), Kimberly Komrad (Gaithersburg, MD), Nathan Lam (Los Angeles, CA), Jeremy Lipton (Los Angeles, CA), Melvin Luterman (Baltimore, MD), Fredda Mendelson (Larchmont, NY), Jacob Mendelson (White Plains, NY), Moshe Schulhof (Aventura, FL), Simon Spiro (London, England) and Alison Wienir (Los Angeles, CA)
- Choral Director: Dr. Iris Levine
- Musical Director: David Kates
- Accompanist: Tova Morcos-Kliger

**Yuval Awards to Rabbis Isaiah Zeldin and Eli Herscher**

Hazzan Sheldon Levin (Metuchen, NJ), Presenter

Chair: Hazzan Nathan Lam (Los Angeles, CA)

**10:30 pm .....Club Room**

**Promenade Concert**

Chair: Hazzan Steven Stoeher (Northbrook, IL)

**Tuesday, May 13<sup>th</sup>**

**7:00 am ..... Sierra Room**

**Shacharit Traditional**

Ba'al T'fillah: Hazzan David Lipp (Louisville, KY)

Gabbai: Hazzan Yehuda Keller (Lakewood, CA)

**7:00 am .....Salon 6**

**Shacharit Egalitarian**

Ba'al T'fillah and Gabbai: Hazzan Frank Lanzkron-Tamarazo  
(Cranford, NJ)

**7:00 am .....Salon 5**

**Shacharit Creative Egalitarian**

Ba'alat T'fillah and Gabbai: Hazzan Eva Robbins (Los Angeles, CA)

**7:40 am .....Salon 6**

**D'var Neginah:** Hazzan Dr. Sholom Kalib (Farmington Hills, MI)

**Chair:** Hazzan Chaim Najman (Southfield, MI)

**8:00 am .....Ballroom B-C**

**Breakfast**

**8:30 am .....Lobby Foyer**

**Registration**

**9:00 am .....Ballroom D**

**56<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting for Members of the Cantors Assembly:**

- Membership Report and Induction of New Members: Hazzan Jeffrey Myers (Massapequa, NY)
- Presentation of Commissions: Hazzan Abraham B. Shapiro (Lynbrook, NY)
- Fiscal Report: Hazzan Joseph Gole (Los Angeles, CA) and Hazzan Abraham B. Shapiro (Lynbrook, NY)
- Masorti Fundraising: Hazzan Jack Chomsky (Columbus, OH)
- Israel Tourism Update: Hazzan Jack Chomsky (Columbus, OH) and Mina Ganem, Counsel for Tourism and Director, Israel Government Tourist Office, Western Region, USA
- Israel Bonds: Rabbi Yaacov Rone
- Hazkarah: Hazzan William Lieberman (Weston, FL)
- Kel Male: Hazzan Emanuel Perlman (Baltimore, MD)
- Pension Update: Nina Rone, CEO, Joint Retirement Board
- Greetings from United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism: Judy Yudof, International President
- Executive Vice President's Report: Hazzan Stephen J. Stein (Akron, OH)
- Honoring of Retirees: Hazzan Saul Hammerman (Baltimore, MD)
- Placement Report: Hazzan Morton Shames (Springfield, MA) and Hazzan Robert Scherr (Natick, MA)
- President's Report: Hazzan Sheldon Levin (Metuchen, NJ)

Hazzan Sheldon Levin (Metuchen, NJ), Presiding



**9:00 am .....Salon 6**

**Alternative Session for Non-Members and Spouses featuring the Composite of the Image of Cantor in Film:**

- The Jazz Singer – 1927 version
- Der Chazn's Zindel: The Cantor's Son starring Moshe Oysher
- The Image of Cantor in Cinema

**9:30 am .....Salon 8**

**How to Become a Member of the Cantors Assembly**

Chair: Hazzan Jeffrey Myers (Massapequa, NY)

**11:15 am ..... Ballroom D**

**Samuel Rosenbaum Award for Scholarship and Creativity:**

Hazzan Abraham Lubin (Bethesda, MD), Recipient

Hazzan Dr. Sholom Kalib (Farmington Hills, MI), Presenter

**Samuel Rosenbaum Memorial Lecture:**

**"The Evolving Rabbinate in Modern Times; a review of how the role of pulpit rabbis have changed over the past 50 years and its implications for both the Cantorate and Laity" –**

Rabbi David Wolpe, Sinai Temple, Los Angeles, CA

Chair: Hazzan Joseph Gole (Los Angeles, CA)

**12:30 pm .....Ballroom B-C**

**Lunch**

Hava Nashir: Hazzan Ilan Mamber (Wyckoff, NJ)

Birkat Hamazon: Hazzan Judith Naimark (Harrisburg, PA)

**1:30 pm .....Ballroom D**

**"Global Terrorism" – Steven Emerson, MSNBC Commentator and Advisor to the Bush Administration on Global Terrorism**

Chair: Hazzan Alison Wienir (Los Angeles, CA)



**3:00 pm .....Ballroom D**

**"Jews Have a Lot of Rethinking to Do"** – Dennis Prager, Radio Commentator and noted Jewish Personality

Chair: Hazzan Linda Kates (Los Angeles, CA)

**4:15 pm .....Ballroom D**

**Services:**

Mincha: Hazzan Larry Goller (Highland Park, IL)

Ma'ariv: Hazzan Martin Goldstein (Denver, CO)

Gabbai: Hazzan Eva Robbins (Los Angeles, CA)

**5:00 pm .....Ballroom B-C**

**Dinner**

Birkat Hamazon: Hazzan Jeffrey Myers (Massapequa, NY)

Chair: Hazzan Robert Scherr (Natick, MA)

**6:20 pm ..... Hotel Main Entrance**

**Leave for Concert at Sinai Temple**

**7:30 pm ..... Sinai Temple**

**Evening Concert: Cantorial Masterpieces featuring members of the Cantors**

**Assembly and the Los Angeles Zimriyah Choir featuring:**

- Hazzanim Roslyn Barak (San Francisco, CA), Ofer Barnoy (Roslyn, NY), Alisa Pomerantz-Boro (San Diego, CA), Farid Dardashti (New Rochelle, NY), Hamid Dardashti (Cherry Hill, NJ), David Feuer (Palm Beach, FL), Chayim Frenkel (Pacific Palisades, CA), Raphael Frieder (Great Neck, NY), Joseph Gole (Los Angeles, CA), Don Gurney (Los Angeles, CA), David Lefkowitz (New York, NY), Alberto Mizrahi (Chicago, IL), Faith Steinsnyder (Spring Valley, NY) and Cory Winters (Glenville, IL)
  - Conductor: Dr. Nick Strimple
  - Mezzo-soprano: Rickie Gole
  - Accompanists: Aryell Cohen and Tova Morcos-Kliger
  - Produced by Hazzan Joseph Gole (Los Angeles, CA) and Lynn Roth
- Chair: Hazzan Joseph Gole (Los Angeles, CA)



10:30 pm .....Club Room

**Promenade Concerts**

Chair: Hazzan Herschel Fox (Encino, CA)

**Wednesday, May 14<sup>th</sup>**

7:00 am ..... Sierra Room

**Shacharit Traditional**

Ba'al T'fillah: Hazzan Sam Weiss (Paramus, NJ)

Gabbai: Hazzan Yehuda Keller (Lakewood, CA)

7:00 am ..... Salon 6

**Shacharit Egalitarian**

Ba'al T'fillah: Hazzan Hamid Dardashti (Cherry Hill, NJ)

Gabbai: Hazzan Eva Robbins (Los Angeles, CA)

7:40 am ..... Sierra Room

**D'var Neginah:** Hazzan Dr. Sholom Kalib (Farmington Hills, MI)

Chair: Hazzan Chaim Najman (Southfield, MI)

8:00 am ..... Ballroom B-C

**Breakfast**

9:00 am ..... Ballroom D

**Shoah Foundation Presentation – “Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation-Link to the Past, Bridge to the Future.”** Presented by: Douglas Greenberg, President and CEO, Ari C. Zev, Vice President for Administration, Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation

**Presentation of Yuval Award to Shoah Foundation**

Hazzan Steven Stoehr, Presenter

Chair: Hazzan Steven Stoehr (Northbrook, IL) and Hazzan Keith Miller (Santa Monica, CA)

**10:30 am .....Ballroom D**

**"Music in Terezin: an Advocacy of Life"** – Dr. Nick Strimple, Lecturer at the University of Southern California, Minister of Music at Beverly Hills Presbyterian Church and Music Director of the Los Angeles Zimriyah Chorale  
Chair: Hazzan Steven Stoehr (Northbrook, IL) and Hazzan Keith Miller (Santa Monica, CA)

**11:45 am .....Ballroom D**

**Memorial Service and Yizkor**

Chair: Hazzan Steven Stoehr (Northbrook, IL)

**12:30 pm .....Ballroom B-C**

**Lunch**

Birkat Hamazon: Hazzan Marcey Wagner (Old Brookville, NY)

**1:30 pm .....Ballroom D**

**"Talking to God: Deepening the Prayer Experience For Ourselves and For Those We Lead"** - Rabbi Naomi Levy, Conservative Rabbi and Noted Author

Chair: Hazzan Nancy Abramson (New York, NY)

**2:45 pm .....Ballroom D**

**"Homosexuality and the Conservative Movement"** – Dr. Elliot Dorff, Rector, Sol & Anne Dorff Professor of Philosophy, Chair of Bioethics, University of Judaism

Chair: Hazzan Henry Rosenblum (New York, NY)

**4:00 pm .....Ballroom D**

**Services:**

Mincha: Hazzan Marcia Tilchin (Tustin, CA)

Ma'ariv: Hazzan Simon Spiro (London, England)

Gabbai: Hazzan Eva Robbins (Los Angeles, CA)

**4:45 pm .....Ballroom D**

**Installation of Officers** – Stephen J. Stein (Akron, OH), Presiding

**5:15 pm .....Ballroom D**

**Screening of "Chazz'n"**

Chair: Hazzan Jacob Mendelson (White Plains, NY)



5:45 pm ..... Ballroom D

**Cantors Assembly Award Presentations (presented by Hazzan Jack Chomsky and distinguished colleagues):**

- Hazzan Yehudah Mandel Humanitarian Award:  
Hazzan Kurt Silberman (Englewood, NJ), Recipient
- Hazzan Saul Meisels Award for Hazzanic Excellence:  
Hazzan Samuel Fordis (Roswell, GA), Recipient
- Hazzan Moshe Nathanson Award for Conducting:  
Hazzan Jerome Kopmar (Englewood, OH), Recipient
- Hazzan David Putterman Award for Lifetime Achievement:  
Hazzan David Lefkowitz (New York, NY), Recipient
- Hazzan Gregor Shelkan Award for Mentoring and Education:  
Hazzan Dr. Pinchas Spiro (Des Moines, IA), Recipient
- Hazzan Moses Silverman Award for Service to the Cantors Assembly:  
Hazzan Larry Vieder (Farmington Hills, MI), Recipient
- Hazzan Dr. Max Wohlberg Award for Composition:  
Hazzan Gerald Cohen (Scarsdale, NY), Recipient

6:15 pm ..... Sierra Foyer  
**Cocktail Reception**

**7:30 pm .....Ballroom B-C**

**Tribute Dinner**

- Greetings from the American Conference of Cantors, Scott Colbert, Executive Vice President
- Greetings from the Jewish Federation of Los Angeles, John Fischel, Executive Director

**Presentation of Kavod Award for distinguished service to the Cantors Assembly:**

Hazzan Saul Hammerman (Baltimore, MD), Recipient

Hazzan Abraham B. Shapiro (Lynbrook, NY), Presenter

**Presentation of Cantors Assembly Scholarship Plaques:**

- Hazzan Sheldon and Nita Polay Levin Scholarship Fund
- Hazzan Chayim Frenkel Scholarship Fund

Hazzan Stephen J. Stein (Akron, OH), Presenter

**Presentation of Presidents' Plaque:**

Hazzan Sheldon Levin (Metuchen, NJ), Recipient

Hazzan Jacob Mendelson (White Plains, NY), Presenter

**Performers: "Sam Glaser in Concert" and Pini Cohen**

Hava Nashir: Hazzanim Joseph Gole (Los Angeles, CA), Nathan Lam (Los Angeles, CA) & Company

Birkat Hamazon: Hazzan Lance Tapper (Bermuda Dunes, CA)

Chairs: Hazzan Nathan Lam (Los Angeles, CA) and Hazzan Jack Chomsky (Columbus, OH)

**11:00 pm .....Club Room**

**Promenade Concert**

Chair: Hazzan Simon Spiro (London, England)



## Thursday, May 15<sup>th</sup>

**7:00 am ..... Sierra Room**

**Shacharit Traditional**

Ba'al T'fillah: Hazzan Yehuda Keller (Lakewood, CA)

Ba'al K'riah and Gabbai: Hazzan Ralph Goren (Margate, NJ)

**7:00 am ..... Salon 6**

**Shacharit Egalitarian**

Ba'al T'fillah: Hazzan Mike Stein (Woodland Hills, CA)

Ba'alot K'riah: Hazzanim Eva Robbins (Los Angeles, CA) and Jodi Sered-Lever (Kansas City, MO)

Gabbai: Hazzan Eva Robbins (Los Angeles, CA)

**8:00 am ..... Ballroom B-C**

**Breakfast (General Attendees)**

**8:00 am ..... Hiro Room**

**Breakfast for New Executive Council Members**

**9:30 am ..... Salon 6**

**Executive Council Meeting**

**9:30 am ..... Hotel Lobby**

**Tour of Los Angeles and Visit to Shoah Foundation**

Chair: Ayelet Tours

**11:00 am ..... Salon 6**

**Officers Meeting**

**12:30 pm ..... Hotel Lobby**

**Afternoon Concert at Los Angeles Jewish Retirement Home**

Chair: Hazzan Joseph Gole (Los Angeles, CA)

## **CANTORS ASSEMBLY MISSION STATEMENT**

**The Cantors Assembly, the largest body of Hazzanim in the world, is the professional organization of Cantors which serves the Jewish world. We are a founder and supporter of the Cantors Institute, now the H. L. Miller Cantorial School of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.  
We are affiliated with the Conservative Movement.**

**Since our founding in 1947, we have remained faithful, as clergy, to our principles:**

- to help our members serve the spiritual and religious needs of their congregants
- to preserve and enhance the traditions of Jewish prayer and synagogue music
- to maintain the highest standards for our sacred calling and those who practice it

**We safeguard the interests of our members by:**

- providing placement services, retirement and pension programs
- publishing materials of Jewish liturgy, music and education
- fostering a spirit of collegiality, cooperation and continued professional growth
- representing Hazzanim to the Jewish and non-Jewish communities at large

**We will build on the traditions of the past and will continue to inspire young people to train for the cantorate. We will teach and touch future generations of Jews through:**

- Jewish liturgy, music and singing
- continued development of creative, vibrant programs
- the personal rapport our members extend to millions of adults and children.

## Visions for Klei Kodesh in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Rabbi Bradley Artson,  
Dean of the Ziegler School at the University of Judaism

Apparently this is the year for the national conventions of Conservative Judaism's agencies to meet in Los Angeles. A month ago we welcomed the Rabbinical Assembly convention. Prior to addressing the plenum of the rabbis, I asked my ten-year-old daughter, Shira, "If you had one thing to say to the Conservative rabbis, what would you tell them?"

"Abba," she said, "tell them to stop."

"Stop what?" I asked.

Shira responded, "Just 'stop'."

Based on her advice to the rabbis, I decided it was prudent not to ask her what wisdom she might offer the Cantorate.

But I do know what I want to share: I want us to reflect together about what it means to be *Klei Kodesh*; what it means to be sacred vessels. What that task entails that is abiding and unchanging, and what in that task is new and needs a different face - if not a different content - than what it had before.

In the Talmud, in *Massekhet Arakhin*, the sages pose a question, noticing that the Torah recounts an obligation to do the work of service<sup>1</sup>. They ask, "What is work that requires service?" The Talmud's answer is, "it is song."<sup>2</sup> Song is a kind of work that requires service. And the ancient sages use as their *pasuk*, their proof-text: "They lifted up their voices and they sang with joy."<sup>3</sup> The Cantorate is in the business of providing service, in part, through song.

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers 4:47.

<sup>2</sup> *Arakhin* 11a.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 24:14.



Music – the kind of work you do – has a special ability to reach places where words cannot, where words fail. The Apocryphal book Ben Sira observes, "Where there is music, do not pour out talk."<sup>4</sup> That insight reflects a recognition that there are truths so profound, moments in life so poignant, that they never can be expressed adequately in words. To confine these truths to a place of consciousness and verbiage is to attempt to master them. But of the really important insights in our lives, we are not the masters. We are participants in these moments, and these lessons come *through* us, but they are not *of* us. Especially in such moments, we require a response more primal than speech and less distinct than the kind of analysis that speech involves. At such moments, there has to be the ability to open up our entire person and to present ourselves whole with the wonder of the moment: "There are palaces that open only to music."<sup>5</sup> The Hazzan is the guardian of that palace.

You are the ones who open the palaces of heaven, and of heart, through song. This opening leads to an important insight about the nature of religion in general, and of Judaism specifically. We live in a paradoxical place because Judaism presents itself as a textual religion, that is to say, a religion which dances with words. (And I am not one to minimize the place of those words and of the content of Judaism in our identity and in our calling.) Yet, at the same time, religion is more than simply analysis of text, it exceeds even the recital of liturgy, it transcends what can be put down on a page. Ultimately, if ours is an *Etz Hayim*, a *Torat Hayim*, a living torah, then it must somehow be incapable of reduction into a book. It can be nothing less than a response of our total being.

In every other endeavor in life, we muster one part of our personality or another. We may analyze, we may have a technical skill, we may work with our hands. In all of the professions that people do, and achieve such magnificent results, they summon a focused part of themselves to that service. But the work we do as *Klei Kodesh* involves integrating every

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<sup>4</sup> Ben Sira 32:4.

<sup>5</sup> *Tikkunei Zohar* 13c.

aspect of our being and of presenting that totality all at once – of being fully present to each other, to the tradition, and to the *Ribbono Shel Olam*. All of which is to say that, for us, religion above all else is an offering of our entire being.

Religion is a way of being – not simply an activity we do. The danger – particularly to those of us whose professional life involves working in religion – is that we begin to confuse the task of our employment with the nature of our work. Woe to those rabbis or cantors who confuse their work with their mission! We are to use our employment as a tool in the service of an encompassing “*oa vhu*, being there<sup>6</sup>” – a total presence. But for many of us who are used to standing on the bema, or by the hospital bed, or at the head of a room and teaching, we think of ourselves as the masters of this tradition, as though the tradition is ours, as if we own it. It is so easy to forget that, in actuality, we are to be owned by this tradition, and that only we ourselves can offer that submission, one at a time.

It is we who chose to give ourselves to this *Masorah*; it is we who chose to place ourselves at the service of the Torah, at the service of the One whom we encounter in the Torah or in the Nusach. The frenetic pace of our schedules, the way that cantors and rabbis are overworked makes it all the more incumbent on us now gathered together to enjoy the luxury of being together to remember that we are ultimately answerable to One greater than the institution in which we work or to our job description.

Toward that ultimate service, I would like to offer three different observations using music as my leitmotif:

Some fashion melodies through music, but for us the fashioning of a melody, ought to involve nothing less than our entire life. The singing that you do is but the tip of the iceberg. Just as with an iceberg in the ocean, the bulk of the ice lies underneath the water and only the tip of it is visible above the surface, so too here – the singing that you do is the very tip of

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<sup>6</sup> Ex 24:12.

what you and I and all of us together are about. It is only one outward manifestation of our larger mission. The great Yiddish novelist Y.L. Peretz observed, "the whole world is nothing more than the singing and a dancing before the Holy Blessing One. Every Jew is a singer before God, and every letter in the Torah is a musical note." Let's take that insight seriously for a moment.

Let's think about what that means – that every single Jew by his or her life is singing before the Lord. Every single letter in the Torah is a note in a larger composition. To think of the world as a song in process is to cultivate a healthy appreciation for human diversity. A symphony is not made greater if all of the instruments perform exactly the same note at exactly the same moment. In fact it is the deliberate expression of different notes at the same time that constitutes musical greatness. So to it is with the symphony of Jewish life, our lives are not made richer by all of us conforming to the same patterns or the same demands or expressing our responsive being in precisely the same way. To the contrary, Jewish life is made richer and vibrant precisely by the diversity of the ways that we live our heritage and holiness.

Central to this whole enterprise is the shocking reality of human consciousness. Take a moment to reflect on how astonishing it is that collections of organic chemicals are able to sit in this hall and to receive a talk from another compilation of organic elements. The miracle of human consciousness, our ability to think and feel and share together, and our consciousness of consciousness (our awareness that we are doing this remarkable thing) ought to inspire us either to silence or song. And because of that then, consciousness becomes one of our greatest gifts, and one of our greatest tools.

Our job as *klei kodesh* is to direct human consciousness back to its source. Our claim as Jews, underneath all of the rituals and underlying all of the tradition, is that there is a cosmic consciousness of which we are the material expression. Being able to direct that consciousness within

creation, to turn and face its source beyond creation, that turning remains an abiding goal. And this can be accomplished in three primary ways.

The first of them, the one that you as a group embody so magnificently, is the key of music. To be able to allow people to open their hearts is a remarkable thing. I officiated at a bat mitzvah celebration yesterday at Sinai Temple in Los Angeles, and watched as the girl's parents – on the verge of tears as their daughter was approaching the bimah, lost it entirely when she started to chant. It is impossible to watch your children standing at the Amud and to hear the melody of Jewish prayer at the same time and to remain stoic. These parents have attended lots of birthdays with their children. In fact, that very evening they had a party at which my daughter tells me the music was quite different, and nobody cried. But on Shabbat morning, gathered in a sanctuary, listening to the words of prayer – that have been hallowed by God and our ancestors and elevated by the musical talents of caring Cantors who brought their skill and their gift to their prayer – that experience pierces the heart like nothing else.

Using music as the way to return to people what they truly feel remains an essential task. I want to plead with you to remain strong in bringing music to the Jewish people. In a Hasidic shteibl, you did not have to sing for people to cry. All you have to do is say, "it is Yom Kippur" and they cry. You say, "we are about to recite Hallel," and they cry. They get up and dance without needing a justification to dance. For most of us, however, this is not where most of our congregants live. (First of all, for most of our congregations, if our Jews got up to dance, they would bang into a pew!) Spontaneity, emotional excess, these have been largely and regrettably eliminated from the Conservative and Reform synagogue. As a result, we have services that are decorous and that begin on time. The one place where Reform and Conservative Jews are able to feel like a Hasid is when they recognize the melody and the melody touches their heart. You are their link to what a service is supposed to feel like. So giving them the ability to move off the page and into heart, this is a gift that in our day only music can accomplish.

But that piercing of the heart is insufficient if the mind does not follow. If the mind doesn't itself become a vessel to reflect on that same place, then the dance remains an isolated epiphany, one solitary moment unconnected to the rest of their lives. If we are to bring about the merging of their mind and their hearts in the service of the Holy One, then there also has to be ways in which we bring to them an understanding in words of what the music conveys them to non-verbally. No less important than the musical heritage that you preserve and often place before them, whether they want it or not, as important as that, is demonstrating to them that the content of these magnificent songs also retains the power to plug us into life in a way that if we did not have it, we would remain naked and alone and purposeless. That means that cantors must also be teachers, with the rabbis, with the educators.

You must also be able to show them the meaning of the prayers that they sing and this in two ways. By educating yourself as I know you do as members of the CA as to the depth of the prayers, but also to live it, and to live it in a way that they see the prayers alive in your deeds, when you are not on the bema. Our people, like our children, are very smart. They have learned to discount what comes out of our mouth if it is not of a piece the fabric of our daily behavior. A life of Torah, a life of mitzvot, a life of gemillut hasadim is the essential prerequisite for anyone who would be klei Kodesh. If you don't walk the walk, get off the bema. Otherwise all that we teach them is pious hypocrisy.

Pious hypocrisy, if anything, will be the death of Conservative Judaism. The thought that it is the kitchen that keeps kosher and not the stomach, that it is the sanctuary which is a place of prayer and a place where Jewish law is followed but in the social hall anything goes is to say that we have successfully imprisoned God inside the Aron Kodesh. We have closed the door so firmly to make sure the Ancient of Days does not get out. But if we don't manifest Jewish passion and a love of Torah in our deeds, then why should we be surprised if our people stop coming to our congregations?

Why should we be surprised if they do not find Judaism compelling in their own life, if they don't see its sway in our own. It is not enough that we observe mitzvot; they must see us observing. It is not enough that we learn; they must know what we are learning. We need to be as eloquent and as powerful off the bema, as we are on the bema. And in this way, only in this way, can the musical notes that are the letters of the Torah sing not only to through our voices but through our hands, through our lives.

Of course you know better than any that while singing alone has its place ultimately singing is a communal activity. According to Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz, "Alone I cannot lift up my voice in song. Then you come near and sing with me, our prayers fuse and a new voice soars. Our bond is beyond voice and voice, our bond is one of spirit and spirit."

Let us remember that in this regard singing is like making love. It works through the body but it is the coming together of souls. Singing is ultimately a spiritual activity, a revelation of intimacy and unguardedness that requires the presence of another. In that way, we also need to reach out to our people and give their voices song. Here I mean that in the most elementary of ways they have lost our musical heritage. The diversity of Jewish music has flattened out, just as Jewish celebration has reduced itself to a relentless Purim (so that at any time of the year we have only one mode of celebrating and that is in the mode of Purim). We don't know how to celebrate Simchat Torah or a bar mitzvah without turning it into Purim. But the question I have is if the only celebrating we can do is Purim, if the only Torah we have is Purim Torah, then what of more subtle modes of joy? Where is our gladness before the Lord? If they are not drinking or tying a bottle to someone's tzitzit, can our Jews rejoice at all?

We live in a larger culture that aggressively and relentlessly reduces its adults to infancy, and teaches them that the only way to rejoice is to abandon mindfulness. Our response has to be an intensification of mindfulness, an intensification of a consciousness that rejoicing does not mean doping ourselves up, drugging ourselves or distracting ourselves to

the point of forgetting who we are. To the contrary, it is by knowing with such intensity who we are, and where we are, and how astonishing a privilege that awareness is - that constitutes the true joy of a Jew. For that consciousness, we need them to teach them how to sing, not merely with their throats, but with their hearts. We need to show them how to be aware of the remarkable privilege that it is to be a part of this people, that it is to be alive, that it is to be on this planet, and to not let these insights go unnoticed.

Cantors are in a sense the alarm clock called to wake up the Jewish people. You are our shofar. That commitment means also that they need to sing with us through their deeds, that we need to help them to live the rhythm of Jewish life. Can we share an understanding of what it means to wake up in the morning and think that it is your job to praise the one who created all of this? Can we help the Jews to know that when we sit down to eat, we are not merely satisfying our bodies, but we are at the same time recognizing that we have been given yet another gift? Our tradition is one that calls for a 100 *berakhot* a day. Let us call for a thousand a day! A million a day! Let the breath we take be itself a *berakhah* of thanks.

Ours is a tradition that teaches that the name of God cannot be pronounced. This is not legalism here; this is a matter of simple fact. The three Hebrew letters in the Bible that are simultaneously consonants and vowels are "yud," "heh," and "vav." A word that consists only of consonants, or only of vowels, is a word that cannot be aspirated; it cannot be pronounced. We don't pronounce the name of God because God's name is nothing less than the breath we breathe. Teaching people that with every breath they take they are articulating the most sacred force that underlies our lives and our being - this remains our calling, our task. What, after all, is the Cantorate if not conscious breathing, artful breathing, deliberate breathing? Yours is the sacred path of shaping God's name into a beautiful niggun.

And then finally, this breathed name of God implies as well that the distinctions we make as material creatures are ultimately fraudulent. Merely because we have bodies, we see the world as divided. We see ourselves as separated. We make categories of people and of professions that allow us to pigeonhole and to ignore. But if Torah teaches anything, it is that heaven and earth can touch. Holiness and secularity exist side by side, and the difference is not in the topic you engage, but what we do with it and what we bring to it. The *Maggid LeD'varav Yaakov* spoke right when he taught: "This is the meaning of Shir Ha-Shirim, the Song of Songs. One who sings a song below can arouse many songs on high." Can we teach our people to sing in such a way that they cause a song on high? Can we help them to understand their feelings, not merely as a reflection of some biochemical reaction, but as a reflection of something larger and more encompassing? Can we teach them that the unity that brings us together undergirds and links everything that appears distinct in the world? That ultimately unity is far more transcendent and far more present than any apparent division?

Ultimately what Klei Kodesh are called to do to teach our people that those things that divide, those things that make distinct are of lesser significance and do not abide to the same degree as that which unites. Our challenge is to reveal that we are – all of us – united as concrete manifestations of a consciousness that reverberates within and through us and sings in our breath, in our songs, and in our words.

The late poet, Siegfried Sassoon, summed it up best:

Everyone suddenly bursts out singing;  
And I was filled with such delight  
As prisoned birds must find in freedom,  
Winging wildly across the white  
Orchards and dark green fields;  
On – on – and out of sight.  
Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted;



And beauty came like the setting sun;  
My heart was shaken with tears; and horror  
Drifted away ... Oh, but everyone  
Was a bird; and the song was wordless –  
the singing will never be done.

I bless you that you also should be as birds singing songs – of words and without words, that your singing should never be done, and that through the power of your song and your example you should enable our people to do the work of service to transform and repair the world.

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson is the Dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies and Vice President at the University of Judaism, Los Angeles. He is the author of *The Bedside Torah: Wisdom, Dreams, & Visions* (McGraw Hill).



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## **A Preview of the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music**

Presented by Milken Family Foundation Chairman Lowell Milken,  
Executive Vice President Richard Sandler and  
Dr. Neil W. Levin, Milken Archive Artistic Director.

The Cantors Assembly was the very first organization to receive an exclusive preview of the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music, a vast recorded panorama of the rich body of Jewish music, both sacred and secular, that has developed over the 350 years of Jewish life in America. The preview preceded the September 2003 release of the first of 50 Milken Archive CDs on Naxos American Classics.

Milken Family Foundation Chairman Lowell Milken, Executive Vice President Richard Sandler, and Artistic Director Neil W. Levin led the presentation which featured video and live performances. Cantor Alberto Mizrahi sang liturgical works from the Milken Archive, while Cantor Simon Spiro together with JTS cantorial student Arianne Slack brought Yiddish theater songs to life. The overview of the Milken Archive moved the audience to offer a standing ovation for the project's quality and scope.

A second session presented "Precious Memories," featuring a trio of videos from the Oral History Video Project component of the Milken Archive, with commentary from Neil W. Levin together with Cantors Joseph Gole and Nathan Lam. The three videos included *Conversations with Moshe Ganchoff*, *A Century of Hazzanut & Hazzanim in Los Angeles*, and *A Revered Generation: Esteemed Cantors, Colleagues & Yiddish Actors in Retrospect*. Several of those cantors profiled are of blessed memory, a testament to the value of the Milken Archive's oral history preservation.

For additional information or to offer comments on the Milken Archive of American Music, please visit [www.MilkenArchive.org](http://www.MilkenArchive.org).

## How Does the Hazzan Best Serve the Needs of A Congregation

Hazzan Stephen J. Stein (Akron, OH)  
Cantors Assembly Executive Vice President

When I began writing my annual address, approximately two months ago, I had no idea that Rabbi Artson would speak on a topic related in nature to the one I had chosen. For those of you who were fortunate enough to hear his brilliant presentation yesterday, I think you will find that our speeches complement one another.

Most often, as your professional organization, the Cantors Assembly tends to focus on the responsibilities that a synagogue has to its Hazzan. We address matters such as salary compensation, benefits and severance, as well as *derekh erets* for the position of Cantor. This year, I would like to talk about the relationship of cantor and congregation from the other perspective, 10 responsibilities that a Hazzan has to his/her synagogue. I list these items not in order of most to least importance, but perhaps from most to least obvious.

- 1) We are counted on to uplift worshipers through our voices. Some of us are blessed with more pleasing voices than others, but those who lack glorious voices are still able to inspire those they serve through *kavanah* and a charisma that engages worshipers. Over time, congregants often come to prefer the voice of their cantor above all others because it is the sound of that specific voice with which a congregation associates *t'fillah*.
- 2) We are a presence in the lives of our congregants at milestone events. We laugh and dance at their *simchas* and we hold their hand and cry with them during times of profound sadness. And, the longer we serve a particular synagogue, the more its members cherish these relationships and the more they depend on the support we provide.
- 3) We are educators of both youth and adults. The interest in continuing adult education is unprecedented in our lifetime. There are more

classes of Judaica being offered in synagogues and Jewish community centers than ever before.

- 4) Speaking of education, the impact that we have on the youth of our congregations fills much of our time. Aside from B'nai Mitzvah instruction, we teach music in our religious schools, direct youth choirs and develop cadres of Torah readers. A congregant of mine told me the following story about a year ago: She was riding in a car with one of her daughters, a college student. As they drove past the elementary school the daughter had attended, the mother pointed and commented, "There is the place, outside of our home, that shaped the person you are." The girl responded by saying, "The greatest influence in my life, aside from you and dad, has been the Cantor." That young lady was just admitted to Harvard Law School. All of us have similar stories we can share.
  
- 5) This brings me to my fifth point. The Hazzan is a role model. Has there ever been a greater need for individuals who lead by positive example? And, the call is for more than role models of Jewish observance. We have to exemplify how people should treat one another as husbands, wives, parents and neighbors. We live in a society that places far too much emphasis on materialism and far too little on common courtesy.

Let me focus primarily, however, on the need for us to be Jewish role models. We are painfully aware of how little our laypeople know and observe. We have often lamented at conventions that they have lost the skill of *davening*. In addition, cantors serve as examples for Conservative Jewish living; that one should not be seen in a shopping mall on Shabbat or eating *treif* in a restaurant. And, even our spouses and children are expected to be role models, though as discussed during Rabbi Artson's session, the expectations of them should not be the same as they are of us. But, we depend on our spouses to show that one can hold a good job and still abstain from going to work on the second day of *Sukkot* or the

seventh day of *Pesah*. Our children demonstrate that SATs and ACTs should not be taken on Saturdays. And, they prove that one can be an "A" student without going to school on *Yom Tov*.

Many of you remember that old commercial in which Jessie White laments how lonely it is to be the Maytag repairman. It is lonely being a Conservative rabbi or cantor, or a family member of a Conservative rabbi or cantor, because in our synagogues there are few true Conservative Jews. As I lamented in my annual address last year, how many members do any of us have who are willing to give up something they really want to do because it conflicts with Shabbat? Is it fair or right that we should be the token observant Jews in our synagogues? The answer is "no" but, we and our families have to set these standards, otherwise our laity will not witness that these are important values and that there are Jews, outside the Orthodox community, who hold them dear.

- 6) Moving on to point 6. The Hazzan is a pastoral counselor. Many times a congregant will come to you rather than the rabbi in search of guidance. A member may feel closer to you for any number of reasons. Perhaps you have been in the congregation longer. Or, maybe, members find you easier to approach and more compassionate. Avail yourself of counseling courses that are offered through your local universities. And, some local hospitals offer seminars for clergy to help them guide families in times of crisis.
- 7) The Hazzan is a Jewish communal leader. Whenever there is an article or advertisement that appears in a newspaper, focusing on Jewish leadership, and the hazzan is not mentioned, I always receive phone calls of complaint from colleagues. But, we are in part to blame for this and it is a subject that the Cantors Assembly has addressed often in recent years. Hazzanim must take a more active role in the larger Jewish community. Here are some examples:

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- a. Contribute to your annual Federation campaign. Were we to poll our membership, inquiring how many of our members donate to their local federation campaigns, I fear we would be embarrassed by the findings. For better or worse, Federation remains a central address for influence and power within the Jewish community.
  - b. Volunteer for an hour or two and participate in your local Super Sunday telethon
  - c. Become a board member of a local day school, Jewish Family Services or JCC
  - d. Become a member of an interfaith council
- 8) That brings me to point 8. The Hazzan can and should be a representative to the non- Jewish community; this is particularly true in smaller cities. Think of how many Christian clergy there are in your community compared with the number of Jewish clergy. There are barely enough rabbis and cantors in any city to field the myriad of questions and requests for personal visits that come from members of other faiths and the religious institutions to which they belong. Every hazzan is an essential contact person for outreach to the non-Jewish community.
- 9) The Hazzan is also a resource to the musical community. You are a person who provides background information and guidance to universities and high schools that are preparing Jewish music or works of Jewish content. Here is a suggestion. Every fall, send a letter to your local elementary, middle and high school choral directors offering assistance in the selection of music for their winter concerts. The students from your congregations will be especially grateful. They are as tired of "I Have A Little Dreydle" as you are.

10) Last, but not least, the Hazzan must be a leader within his/her congregation. I spoke a few moments ago about leadership within the Jewish community, but what of being a leader in your own synagogue? You don't work for your rabbi, rather you work with him/her in guiding a congregation. When your rabbi is away, you are the one called on to assume those duties. In many congregations, in addition to his/her other responsibilities, the hazzan functions as an assistant rabbi. And, when there are conflicts among different parties or factions within a synagogue, the hazzan is often sought out to be the peacemaker. In truth, a synagogue needs both the rabbi and hazzan to be leaders. It is too big of a job for one person to handle.

In conclusion, the expectations of hazzanim at this point in diaspora history are high. We certainly understand that each of us cannot excel in all of the diverse categories I have mentioned this morning. But, it is incumbent upon all of us to strive to do our very best, serving our congregations in as many different ways as we can.

Let us remember what it was that brought us to what our beloved Sam Rosenbaum, *zichrono livracha*, used to refer to as a "sacred calling." We chose this vocation out of a love for music and Jewish living. More importantly, we became hazzanim to touch the lives of others through our voices and a commitment to perpetuating Jewish values and *mentschlichkeit*. With G-d's guidance, may each of us be blessed with ongoing wisdom and perseverance to positively impact the congregants and congregations we are privileged to serve.

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**Samuel Rosenbaum Memorial Lecture: The Evolving Rabbinate in Modern Times; a review of how the role of pulpit rabbis have changed over the past 50 years and its implications for both the Cantorate and Laity**

Rabbi David Wolpe  
Sinai Temple, Los Angeles, CA

You know there have not been many great Jewish quarterbacks in history, but there was at least one – Sid Luckman. Sid Luckman, who was famous for being the quarterback of the Chicago Bears, was the child of immigrants. His parents knew and understood nothing about football, but he wanted them to know what he did. So, in one of his first professional football games, he got the coach's permission to bring not only his parents to the game, but to seat them on the bench next to the field. This way they would not be in the bleachers where they couldn't ask anyone questions about what was going on in the game. His parents witnessed a point of the game when their son Sid drops back and there was no one open. All of the receivers were covered and a couple of linebackers broke through the line and were chasing him. As these large people, who obviously intended to do him harm, were pursuing him, his mother jumped up and yelled "Sid give them the ball I'll buy you a new one." I am telling you this story because it illustrates the condition I was asked to speak about this morning, which is the difference between my father's rabbinate and my own.

There was a time when the condition of American Jews was that they were immigrants to America and natives to Judaism. That is what made the story above funny. If you called Sid Luckman's father for a *minyan*, he would probably know exactly what to do, but put him in a football game, he has no idea what is going on. That was the condition of many of my father's congregants, which there were a lot of generations in a large synagogue, especially at the beginning of his rabbinate. I remember my senior *homiletics* class, when the Dean of American Conservative Rabbis, Simon Greenberg, said that your job as a rabbi is to explain American to you congregants. Presently, most congregations understand America very well, except if you happen to have a large population of immigrants, like the



group of Iranians at my congregation. You don't have to tell them what America is about. They are natives of America, but immigrants to Judaism. Therefore, when they walk into a synagogue, they are very uncomfortable. They don't know the language. They don't speak the prayer book. They don't know when to stand up or sit down. Even as a kid, I was aware of the fact that people were watching us. When we would stand up, they would all stand up. After all, the rabbi's kids should all know when to stand up. But most congregants don't speak that symbolic language any longer. The ones that do tend to be the older ones who are still a part of that native immigrant split. So the question is, what do you do with a largely unlettered population? The answer is to educate them. I believe that this is a wonderful answer and I am all for it, but mere education begs the question of how do you involve people who are not yet educated or who are beginning their steps in a very long road to their education make any real sense of what the prayer service is all about? In order to help people understand better, Rabbi Reuven Hammer recently published a book where there is commentary on every page that is identical to the *siddur sim shalom* so you can follow along. Although it is still in hardback, pretty large and cumbersome, it is wonderfully done. It is very useful, but it is not the same as really knowing the service.

This leads to the first paradox that I want to discuss; the less educated the congregants are, the more they want to participate in the service. Let's take the *chazarat hashatz* as an example. At my father's congregation, everyone who knew and repeated the *amidah* was perfectly happy to listen to it and expected to listen to it. That was that way because they had just *davened* it. In many congregations today, people want to sing along because they haven't *davened* it; they want to participate. Like most art, Cantorial art takes some education to appreciate, whereas popular melodies don't and it is very easy for people to join in. Part of what we struggle with as Jewish professionals is this elite/popular split. Since we are a demanding tradition, we must ask ourselves to what extent do we hold out an elite ideal of what it means to be a Jew and require congregants to come up to the standard? To what extent do we say that

you have to meet someone *ba'asher hu sham*-- wherever one is and hopefully engage their hearts and minds in the desire that they will one day elevate themselves to a new level. In the most recent issue of Commentary Magazine, Jack Worthheimer wrote an article in which he essentially said that the problem with all these rabbis these days is that they all want to be participatory and they should be telling their congregants what to do. He also said that they should be more authoritarian. He wanted the rabbi to say what the right way was and have no discussion about it from anyone else. Lastly, he felt that having a ritual committee composed of people who don't know *halacha* was just ridiculous. In a way, we do this as well. While I am invested, in a certain way, with the participatory ideal; I don't engage in it during my sermons. In other words, I invite everybody to sing together, but I want them to be quiet because I am talking. There is also a contradiction that although you can ask questions and make suggestions about the *parsha*, in the end, you must learn it, whereas prayer is essentially participatory. We struggle with these divisions often, therefore, we have to decide to what extent do we have to educate people to be able to appreciate classical *Hazzanut*, to what extent do we want to engage them in singing, and to what extent is singing along praying? For example, we created this service called *Friday Night Live* in which everybody sings and claps. Now, we ask is that prayer or singing?

I don't have an answer to all these questions. In fact, there may be some value in admitting that we don't have one single answer that is adequate and we all struggle with this. Part of it has to do with our own tendencies. People have different gifts, ideas and training. It also has to do in part with the congregation and how we view them. I want to make at least some suggestions about what this dilemma means and what it ultimately portends. Part of the native/immigrant split is that an immigrant, by his very nature, always feels a little insecure and a little depressed. Studies on people who have immigrated to the United States, show an almost consistent low level of depression. You can understand why. Immigrants never completely feel at home, because home is partly what you grew up with. If you didn't grow up in a country, especially if your country of origin is

no longer accessible to you, you always feel a little displaced and everyone treats you as essentially different. I have a friend whose grandmother was an immigrant from Germany. She was a doctor and she always used to say that every time she calls directory assistance, they treat her like she's an idiot because she had a very heavy German accent. They would speak slowly and distinctly. There is also that sense of things being very hard and this is depressing. The only reason that many immigrants to America are going to carry this out is that America is very valuable and they want it for their children. It is very easy to convince immigrants that they don't belong. That translates over to our congregants as well. We have a very tenuous hold on them because the vast majority are not willing to tough it out week after week in an atmosphere where they feel alien. The only certainty of embracing them in such an atmosphere is if they have other like them present. There is nothing like community. Creating a community is the most powerful thing that a synagogue can do to bring people back, week after week. There is that old joke that 'Schwartz goes to pray to God and I go to talk to Schwartz.' Of the two, I think that 'I go to talk to Schwartz' may be a more powerful motivation for people to come to synagogue. The individual who has a very tenuous hold on what is going on in the synagogue, has to find for herself something that she feels mastery of. Remember that you are dealing with people who feel mastery in other areas of their lives. They are not immigrants to America; they are very successful and they don't want to feel incompetent. They don't like it and they don't want it. I don't blame them. It is because they are incompetent in a place where they are supposed to be competent. It is one thing to walk into a church and to feel out of it and ask for help. But they are supposed to *know* in a synagogue. There is this sense of real insecurity and inadequacy that afflicts many of our members. To what extent do you make a service more accessible to the less educated before you upset the people who are educated? That is a question that gets asked in every synagogue, in every city, all the time, for which there is no good single answer. The Rabbi and the Cantor are completely equally implicated in the solution of the dilemma. This isn't one that we can do alone and it really isn't one that the congregation can do for us, since the question is to what

extent does the congregation drive the agenda as opposed to what we see as these immutable standards of what Jews are supposed to do.

The second piece of the difference between my father's rabbinate and my own is the whole idea of the spiritual community. I grew up in a home where community was real history, anti-Semitism, federation, and education were very important; however, spirituality and discussion about God were not at all central to the experience I had. Not in my home, not in my synagogue, not in my day school and not at Camp Ramah. It just wasn't part of the agenda. My mother still tells me that she remembers when Heschel first came to the Jewish Theological Seminary and was going to give his inaugural lecture. She said that everyone's inaugural lecture was usually some obscure, academic thing where everyone would gush about what a great scholar the speaker was whether they understood it or not. So my parents went to Heschel's inaugural lecture and he covered his eyes and started humming. He begins with a *niggun* and everyone looked at each other like he was obviously a creature from another planet. The idea of ever beginning a lecture like that was so alien and the *Hasidic* tradition was a matter of some dry academic interest. That was the atmosphere that shaped Judaism as I grew up. Once I got a call from a reporter while I sat at my desk at the University of Judaism. He wanted to know if I would be willing to be interviewed for a cover story on God in *Newsweek Magazine*. I agreed. In the course of the interview, I basically told him what I said above about my background. Afterwards, I waited for my *Newsweek* to arrive. Finally, it did. The article was called "Talking to God." It had my picture and a couple of paragraphs under it, which began as follows:

My father was a Rabbi and a good one, but growing up in his house, he never once mentioned God.

At the time, my father was still the Rabbi of a large congregation and my heart dropped because I could hear the voices of his congregants in my head. They were going to say that I seemed to get along so well with my father, but look what I said about him in a national magazine. So I sprung

into action and I ran to my office to call my father. My father, who is a very gentle guy, said he understood how anxious I was and things like this happen and he was not upset. Then I called my mother who is somewhat less gentle and told her the same thing I told my father. After I was finished, she didn't say a word. So I went on to tell her that I just talked to my father and he was OK. Upon hearing that, my mother made the only comment for the whole conversation. She said "uh-huh." I know that I haven't heard the end of this. Sure enough, a couple weeks later, I see a letter in my mailbox from my father. Once again, my heart sinks because I know my father. He would not say that I did a terrible thing and how could I say that about him; however, he might utilize guilt. He could say that he hopes I learned a lesson from this and I have to realize that I have to be very careful when I talk to reporters. He could also say that I should especially know this since I am a Rabbi and people have reputations in the community. I opened the letter and inside it read "Dear David, GODGODGODGODGODGODGOD" (all the way down the page). Then it ended with a P.S. "this is just in case *Time* calls you for an interview."

The truth is that the conflict was real; it wasn't an issue in the Judaism I grew up in. Part of the participatory drive is a will to express a spirituality which cannot be expressed in terms of what one doesn't understand oneself. How can you express a spirituality through the *Aleinu* when you are not pronouncing the words exactly right and you don't know what they mean, but you have heard it enough times that you can imitate them. That is the same kind of thing that would happen to us if we went to a service that was in Greek and listened to it for a year. We would do the same thing. If someone asked if you were expressing your deepest soul in this, you would say not so much. But if you walked into that same service and there was a song with a word or two that you could pronounce and you had someone to ask questions about what it means, you could sing along. After six months or so, I could ask you again if you were expressing your soul. This time you might say yes.

Speech is not the same as song. With speech, you can get away with the same story a couple of times. Even the most wonderful speech that you could listen to you can only listen 3-4 times and then it is boring. With song, you can listen to the same thing again and again. You can listen to *nusach* your whole life. So when someone says that they are expressing their soul through it, it is in part because of the words have become irrelevant. To say the words again and again isn't what does it; it is the music. As people have grown less educated, they have grown more interested in expressing that which is within them. We are in a sense moving in two directions that are both hard. First, we are maintaining an educated liturgy to people who can't grasp it. Secondly, it is not designed for them to express themselves in an age where people are seeking more self-expression. Now having said all of that, none of us wants to lose the tradition; therefore, we are caught. That sense of being caught plays itself out in a hundred conversations in synagogues and services all the time. If you want to *daven*, you come at the beginning of the service. Most people are not there during that portion. Most people come later for the singing at *musaf* to listen to the Cantor and the Choir and the Sermon. It is strange, paradoxical and infuriating, while in some ways, it is also a wonderful set up because congregants *are* coming. However, I am not under the illusion that changing the service will change the pattern. You will always have lay people who will say that if we made it more accessible that they would throng to the door. But look at the Reform movement, which has made the service extremely accessible, but doesn't draw to regular services. Look at the Orthodox movement, which makes the service much less accessible but have many people who are willing to go through the difficult training necessary in order to be at the service. There is no single formula. I am not here to prescribe this in the absence of knowing your congregation, but all these fault lines are real. Part of what I think is necessary and part of the reason why we, for example, have a very large synagogue attendance, has little to do with the service itself and a lot to do with the community. Creating links between people and the synagogue brings people to synagogue, because the community is the nexus between learning, spirituality, prayer and song. If you are lucky enough to have an intact

community, then that is possible to create as a vibrant and working model for a synagogue.

I believe our role in this task, which can be both painful and undeniable in being a clergy, is to know the nature and the extent of our personal gifts. People will go to hear a one particular Rabbi or Cantor and not another one only because this one speaks in a way or sings in a way or involves in a way that that another doesn't. We need to ruthlessly evaluate what we are good at and try to move our congregations in the direction of our strengths, because the success of the clergy is the success of the congregation. You can't have a successful congregation and failed clergy. You can't do it. Ideally, you should be able to, but it doesn't happen. We have to think about what do we do well and then [and this is the hardest part] we have to give up on the other stuff. Then we need to divest ourselves of the ego need of being involved in all those things that we don't do well. We each have strengths and the congregation will come to count on our strengths. For example, if you are a Rabbi who is not a good speaker, but you have a wonderful pastoral presence, and you spent all your time preparing your sermons and not going to the Hospital, you are doing yourself a great disservice. You should do what you do best. People will cathect to your best. You must realize that you will always be blamed for not doing the other stuff anyway. Blame is a constant. That is not because congregants are narrow-minded or foolish, it is because they are human beings. Human beings have unlimited needs and those needs will never be met. Therefore, if you focus on meeting the needs that you can actually meet, and not expend yourself in trying forever to meet those needs that you can't, then that is good advice, both in your relationships and in your congregation's. We must not think in terms of what kind of service *do* we create, but in what kind of service *can* we create for our congregation. This takes a ruthless self-examination, because you can't always trust anyone else, except perhaps people who are very close to you, to tell you what it is that you are good at and what you aren't. Once you decide what it is that you can do then it is time to enlist partners and bring them with you. People become invested in things that they actually participate in. In a

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synagogue, people who sing feel that the service is theirs in a way that those who don't sing don't. On the other hand, people who appreciate the *hazzanut* will feel a part of it in a way that those who don't appreciate it don't. You have to decide on what you can give your congregants that will make them feel that you are not just performing for them, but that it is a communal activity and they are a part of it.

The last part of this has to do with us as individuals and this is an exhortation that I would offer you and you can do with it what you will. The single most difficult part of being in the clergy is that to some extent you hide. All of us hide. I don't only mean that we hide in overt ways, like I don't want to go to that restaurant because I will see all my congregants there or I am not so sure that I want to shop at that store because they will think that I make too much money, etc. I mean in more subtle ways. Your art is what allows you to conceal yourself. It is true that all of you express yourself through singing but you also hide yourself through singing. I express myself through preaching but I also hide myself through preaching. All of your congregants, who are astute enough and care enough, feel that. In the process of figuring out what it is that you want and that you want to do what you can, don't hide. An amazing realization that came to me somewhere along the line, is that this isn't actually my rabbinate; this is my life. That is what I always tell rabbinical students. When you make a decision of whether to go to this event or not, or that *bar mitzvah* party or something else, don't think of it in terms of how this is for your job, think of it as how this is for your life? It *is* your life. You could spend 30 years in a congregation and they will never know you; therefore, you will have never expressed yourself to the people who you are supposed to create community with.

A couple of years ago, I gave a sermon that was very controversial about whether the Exodus happened like the Bible said it did and some people asked me why I did it. The people who were really asking why I decided to do it, not why a *Rabbi* would decide to do it. The answer was because I don't want to hide. I don't want to stand in front of my congregation week



after week and not let them know who I am. Even if letting them know who I am means that they don't want me. It is still better than being someone false and having them all say that my sermon was great. The point is what you want in terms of elite popularity has to do with who you are in your soul. Don't be afraid to express it because this is our only shot. After all, you can retire after thirty or forty years from a congregation [if you are lucky] and look out at that congregation and know that none of them know who you are. That is a profoundly lonely feeling in a business that is designed to make us profoundly lonely in the first place. It is important to think of ourselves as *klei kodesh* in all sorts of ways, but we have to remember that we were people before we were *klei kodesh* and people have a deep need to be known. If we believe that the Judaism we practice is real, we must let people know us so they can believe that they can practice it too. That is a powerful mission. In some ways, it is the critical difference between my parents' generation and our own. Then, it was important for the Rabbi to stand up here, to stay far away and protected behind the podium. As you saw, I still have those reflexes. That is what I was brought up with and that is deeply ingrained in who I am. I fight against it because I realize that you cannot create community from behind the podium. Only when you let people know that you are not only leading them, but you are actually a part of them, a community is created. If you can do that, then I believe that people will stick around long enough to find out what it is that made them feel that way and you will be able to teach them the tradition, which is wonderful, rich and inexpressible in words. That tradition will bring your congregants back week after week and year after year.

## Jews Have a Lot of Rethinking to Do

Dennis Prager

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The Dennis Prager Show

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I have a joke for you. I rarely start a talk with a joke, but you are one of the groups that would appreciate this one. There was a rabbi, a priest and a minister. They had decided that for the sake of world brotherhood, peace, and ecumenism among religions, each would drop something substantial from his religion in order to bring the religions together. The Catholic priest announces that for the sake of world brotherhood, peace, and ecumenism, he was prepared to drop the virgin birth. The Protestant minister says that for the sake of world brotherhood, peace, and ecumenism, he was prepared to drop the divinity of Jesus. And the Rabbi announces that for the sake of world brotherhood, peace, and ecumenism, he is prepared to drop the second *yikum purkan*.

I give you my word that I have never told this joke in public before.

I recently spoke at the Torah School in Des Moines, Iowa, where I experienced something unique. It was a Jewish day school run by Orthodox Rabbis that accepts non-Jewish students. One fifth of their school is not Jewish. I was thrilled to hear this: it is a *kiddush Hashem* of the first order. My motto in life is that the Torah has something to say to everyone or it has nothing to say to Jews. The notion that you only teach Torah to Jews is bizarre to me.

I want you to know that I have no agenda other than Judaism prevailing and doing well. To prove that I have no agenda, I want to tell you a little about myself from the perspectives of the various Jewish movements.

From a Conservative standpoint, I have taught at the University of Judaism for twenty years. Ten of those years, I have taught the Torah verse by

verse. We have very nice turnouts with people of all faiths, which is very important to me. My child goes to Camp Ramah.

From an Orthodox standpoint, my older son went to an Orthodox day school through High School. He went to a black-hat yeshiva to study. I am on a Board of Directors of a *Chabad* School in an area northwest of Los Angeles.

From a Reform standpoint, I have been attending a Reform synagogue every Shabbat for ten years.

As you can see, I am committed to helping each denomination succeed.

I am also very fortunate to have spoken in just about every Jewish community in the United States. In the last six months, I have given about 70 speeches. About 50 of them were given to Jewish groups. Obviously I am deeply involved in Jewish life.

My other side is that I am a talk show host on a general talk show (i.e. not a Jewish talk show, although all of my listeners know that I am Jewish).

I have come to believe that we have a big *emunah* problem in Jewish life. God is not doing well in Jewish life. *Halakha* may be doing great. Conservative Rabbis and Cantors are becoming more and more *halakhically* oriented. It was once common for Conservative Rabbis to drive to *shul*, now it is extremely rare. Spark plugs have assumed an important place. No one in the movement is prepared to drop *yom tov sheni*, even though in their heart many believe it is entirely unnecessary.

*Halakha* is doing better than ever in Orthodox life, in Conservative life, and even many Reform Jews are becoming more observant.

There are, however, three components to Judaism – God, Torah and Israel – and while Torah and Israel are not doing badly, God is doing lousy. And

you cannot have Judaism without faith. I have become more and more aware of the consequences of this.

I will give you a few examples:

For a Jewish parent to say to his/her children that God loves them is almost inconceivable. Why? In large part, because the Jewish parent associates those words only with Christians. For most American Jews, their religiosity is formed as much by not being Christians as it is by being Jewish. This is terrible and sad. If you didn't know I was a Jew but knew that I told my child that God loves him, you would assume that I was Christian. It would shock you to know that I went to *shul*. *Shul*-goers just don't talk like that. We say *ahavah rabbah ahavtanu*, you *daven* this with your wonderful voices in your *shuls*. "With great love, God, you have loved us." We are apparently permitted to say in Hebrew. But if we say it in English, we are Christians! We are allowed to say it in Hebrew and in the plural, but to say it in English and in the singular means leaving the normative expression of contemporary Jews.

I recently gave a speech on why so many Jews are alienated from God. I would love you to get that tape, although I am not here to sell you tapes, but those who are interested can go to my website, [www.dennisprager.com](http://www.dennisprager.com), and get it. It is a lifetime of thought that basically states that of all the groups in America identifiable by religion, Jews are the most secular. That is a fact. It is not just a fact among secular Jews, it is a fact in Jewish life as a whole. God just isn't central.

I went to Orthodox *yeshivas* until I was 18. We almost never spoke about God; we talked about *halakha*. I learned how to build a *sukkah* with exact measurements. I learned about an egg that is born on *yom tov*, whether or not you could eat it. But how to relate to God? If I would have asked my *rebbe* how to relate to God, he would have thought I was influenced by Jerry Falwell.

Today, it has gotten better in much of Orthodox life. I know this from my son, who did attend this *yeshivah* in Israel. But in modern Orthodox life, God is still not much of an issue. In general, you have to go pretty far to the right to get to a lot of God.

The Hasidic movement arose because Judaism had become basically *wissenschaft*, which hits home for Conservative Jews. *Wissenschaft des Judentums* is the scientific study of Judaism. It is fine to have a scientific study of Judaism, but it is not necessary to bring you closer to God and it doesn't. God is the central issue and I will give you an example of how central *emunah* is. What I am about to tell you is of overwhelming significance.

During the height of the terror in Israel, the Reform movement cancelled its youth trips to Israel, while the Orthodox kept them. It is critical to note that as you leave faith or *emunah*, it has an existential consequence. It is not just a theologically interesting question of how strong do you believe in God. That God is behind Judaism and the Torah and that Jews are the chosen people are not little issues of inconsequence. They are enormously significant. The Jews who most believe it send their kids to Israel when they could be blown up and the Jews who less believe it, don't. That is a fact.

Why did I let my son go to Israel for a year in the height of the Palestinian terror? Because I deeply believe in God, that God is behind Judaism and God wants Jews not to abandon Israel. I do not believe that God will necessarily guard my son or that God would necessarily guard me when I went to Israel last year for a week. God is not a celestial butler to me. When I talk about *emunah*, I am not talking about the *emunah* of "Hey, nothing can happen to me because *Hashem* is with me." No. *Hashem* wants my child to go to Israel (if my child wants to go and therefore I didn't make him). We believers worry about our kids as much as Reform parents or secular Jewish parents do but Jews were God-centered were more likely to send their children to Israel. That is a big deal. There is no other

explanation for the Reform movement canceling their trips and the Orthodox movement not.

There is no reason for being a Jew if God is not central. We have overdone the notion of the *Beit Keneset* as a meeting place rather than a *Beit T'fillah*. We need God individually and as a community. The Conservative movement is in trouble on the God issue and here are some examples:

The following is said only with the deepest respect for my longtime and dear friend, Rabbi David Wolpe. His talk on *y'tsiat mitzrayim* represents a Conservative problem. The archaeologists don't have proof that we were in Egypt? I don't give a damn. That is as inconsequential to me regarding the exodus as finding more fossils is to God's creating the world. I have no problem with fossils and I have no problem with archaeology. Archeology is not the source of my *emunah*; the Torah is. There is no doubt in my mind that Jews were in Egypt. I am as certain of that as I am that George Washington was the first president of the United States. I don't really care what the latest belief archaeology has. After all, what kind of people would make up such an undignified beginning as the Torah has about Jews? The Torah is believable precisely because the Jews come out so lousy. There is no bible of any religion that so negatively depicts its group as our Bible. Christians are great in the New Testament, Muslims are great in the Koran, Hindus are great in the Bhagavad Gita and Buddhists who reach enlightenment are great in the Buddhist Scriptures. Jews in the Torah are jerks. Jews in the Prophets are jerks. Do you know who is great in the Torah? Noah is, but he isn't Jewish. The daughter of Pharaoh; she's not Jewish. The midwives are not Jewish, but they save Jewish kids. On the other hand, God was so sick of the Jews that he wanted to kill them, but Moses talked him out of it. Why would people make that up? We look awful. It is far more persuasive than archaeology that the Torah is no negative about our origins and the way we are. Let's go beyond that. Why would I have a *seder* for an event I didn't believe existed? How could I look at my child and honestly say *avadim hayinu l'pharoh b'mitsrayim* – "We

were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt"? How could I say that? Is it a metaphor? Why would I have a *seder* for an event I didn't believe existed? What is a Conservative Jew to do after hearing that?

Judaism stands on two faith statements; the Creation and the Exodus. You remove them and there is no reason to stay Jewish. What am I going to stay Jewish for? *Bedikat chametz*? What am I going to stay Jewish for when I don't have the faith? I do *bedikat chametz* because I believe God took us out of Egypt and *chametz* represents the antithesis of what the Torah wants. It represents Egypt, which invented bread.

I have a whole theology of it. I believe that the Torah is divine. How it got divine, I do not know and I don't care. The more I teach the Torah, the more I believe in its divinity. I believe in the Thirteen Principles of Maimonides. I am not Orthodox because I do not believe that the Oral Law is divine and I believe that rabbinic law must change. Therefore, I don't keep *yom tov sheni* because I believe it violates the Torah. To me it is wrong to keep *yom tov sheni*. It is not that it *can* be dropped; it *should* be dropped. I use musical instruments on Shabbat because God wants us to use musical instruments on Shabbat. Why should we leave great religious music to Handel? The most moving musical religious piece is Handel's Messiah. It happens to not be my messiah, but it still moves me. The rabbis gave us a double whammy: no temple and no instruments. I love the rabbis. They were giants, but human giants. The Torah is divine. I believe it and I'll take any challenge on any verse you want. I teach Torah on the premise that it is divine. That is a very different way to study the Torah than *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, where you try to determine which verses are Jehovah, which are Elohim, which are Priestly, and so forth.

This brings me to the most pressing issue when confronting a denomination and that is homosexuality. The Torah says that a man shall not lie with another man as a woman; it is an abomination. You don't like the verse; neither do I. I just wrote a piece on homosexuals, which you can find on my website. I take flak from some on the right, because I always argue for

the dignity and honor of every homosexual and that they are created in God's image just as much as heterosexuals are. Yet the Torah tells me that male homosexual sex is an abomination; therefore, it is an abomination. What else can I do with it? I don't necessarily like that verse, but if I picked the verses that I liked, then I would be the Torah. I would have faith in Dennis. *Sh'ma Dennis*.

We have to be intellectually honest. If the Torah is a divine document, we cannot pick and choose what is divine. The chooser becomes his own divinity maker.

Homosexuality is wrong. Did I say that homosexuals chose homosexuality? They didn't choose it. There are a lot of things in life that you don't choose that may be wrong. Men don't choose to yearn for sexual variety, yet the Torah proscribes adultery. Few of us have total freedom of choice in a lot of areas and that is just the way life works. Nor am I telling any gay person how to lead their life. I don't want gays or straights to be lonely. And I don't want to abandon the Torah's heterosexual ideal.

In my opinion, marrying a man with a man or a woman with a woman violates the essence of the Torah. "Therefore the man shall leave his mother and father and cling to his wife." It does not say that he clings to the one he loves or to his partner. This is painful because we all have dear, beloved people who are gay in our lives. But I have dear, beloved people who are single in my life and I ask them not to adopt children. Do I love them less? No! I think a child should start life with a mother and a father. It is not anti-that person. It is not anti-gay. This is pro-Torah and pro-child. This is what the Torah tells me. Do I have a trouble with it? Yes I do, but that is what it tells me.

Many times I have debated this with your speaker tomorrow. It is even in print. If you send me an e-mail, I will be happy to send a 10,000 word debate from the Jewish Journal of Los Angeles. Rabbi Dorff and I took over six weeks on this issue because it is so significant. Accepting same-



sex marriage will tear your movement apart and I am sorry to say so but it should. That is how significant I think it is. If you think that *kiddushin* is a man with a man or a woman with a woman, then the Torah is a book of suggestions.

Let's be honest. Those who say that the Torah is a human book and they don't think homosexual relations are wrong are being intellectually honest. But those that say, "That's not what the Torah meant" are not being intellectually honest.

Here are two examples. One argument is that the Torah uses the term "abomination" in regard to eating shellfish, so "abomination" is clearly not a moral term. But there is a big difference. When the Torah uses the term *toevah* for shellfish, that is an "abomination" *lachem* – for you Jews. On a man lying with a man or animal, it is an abomination, period. That is universal. Not just Jewish.

The second argument is that homosexuality had only to do with religious cult matters – there was homosexual and heterosexual prostitution in pagan temples, and that is what the Torah forbade. Now, of course there was homosexual and heterosexual prostitution in pagan temples, but that is irrelevant to the sentence. It is wrenched out of context to ascribe it to a religious cult. It's true context is very powerful; homosexual sex is listed among sins such as child sacrifice and other things that most of us would agree were abominable to God.

Look, it is a terrible problem. I had a great lesbian woman as my guest for an hour on my show today. I honor gays as humans and that is a non-issue to me, but my position stands because it is based upon a value system around the Torah which I believe is divine. There is nothing I can do about it. All I can do is mix two things that people think cannot be mixed, which is standards and compassion.

I will tell you how I deal with both because nowadays compassion has trumped standards. The purpose of religion is not only to teach compassion; it is to teach standards. How do I balance the two? You can do it by placing compassion in the micro realm and standards in the macro realm. I have a fellow colleague in radio who is gay and I have tried try to find him a boyfriend. There is no doubt in my mind that he has only been attracted to men all his life and I don't want him to be alone. But, I would say that any priest, minister or rabbi that married them was committing a major sin.

That is how I combine compassion with standards. Compassion cannot trump standards just because you feel for your sister or daughter or son or brother or dear friend who is gay. These are emotionally terrible issues, but at a given point, that is what religion is about – taking a stand. If every time, issues were resolved by feeling compassion, who would need religion? What is Judaism's purpose then? *Yom tov sheni*? I keep picking on that because as I wrote in my response:

What is the Conservative movement going to do? Is it going to reinterpret the Torah to have same-sex marriage, but keep *yom tov sheni*? It would become one of the most bizarre movements in all Western religion – very very strict about adding an extra day to a holiday whose date we know precisely, and strict about not igniting sparkplugs on Saturdays. There, Conservative Judaism is really strict. But men marrying men? That's not an issue! It is just astonishing to me that that could happen. And it could happen.

Next is a talk that I have given at much greater length to Jews, but I will give you the synopsis. Around the country since 9/11, I believe that American Jewry is in a period of tremendous cognitive dissonance. What most American Jews most trusted turns out close to being their enemy and what American Jews most mistrusted turns out to be their best friend.

Let me begin with the mistrusted. Most American Jews have walked around mistrusting Christians, as most Jews do worldwide. Since 9/11, the world has been "ganging up" on Israel and Jews and the one loyal staunch ally that we have are the two groups Jews most mistrusted: Christians and Conservatives. If I were a secular, liberal Jew, I would be going crazy now, unless I wanted to deny the obvious.

How does one explain what is going on? I want to explain it to you because I have respected these Christians for far longer than since 9/11. This realization was like a light bulb to me. Every Jew must understand that American Christians are not European Christians. They have almost nothing in common and they never have. They left Europe in order to reject European life. Thomas Jefferson wanted the seal of the United States to depict the Israelites escaping Egypt at the edge of the sea (you can find the drawing on the Internet). This country was founded by Judeo-oriented Christians. That is why this is the only country in human history that calls itself Judeo-Christian and not just Christian. European Christians were not Judeo-Christians. The term Judeo-Christian is not a Jewish invention; it was invented by American Christians. American Christians are different and we should never conflate America's Christians with Europe's Christians. For example, the Holocaust was European. The Pogroms were European. The Inquisition was European. The Ghettos were European. This country has been the biggest blessing for Jews in the history of Jewish life.

As for American Christians supporting Israel, you have two choices; you can dismiss their support or you can change your attitude towards Christians. Jews are divided on this subject. The Jews who do not want to change their attitude towards Christians, especially Conservative Christians, dismiss Christian support with the argument: you are naïve if you don't recognize that the Christians have an agenda. And what is that agenda? One is to convert us. But of course they want to convert us; they want to convert everyone. They believe that everyone should come to Christ. That is their prerogative, and it doesn't bother me in the least. But

Christians do not have a specific agenda that says they should support Israel in order to convert Jews. Do you know of one Jew who became a Christian just because Christians support Israel? Of course not! Anyway, wouldn't Christians also much rather have a hundred million Muslims convert than a few Jews? If converting non-Christians determined the Christians' Middle East agenda, they would surely be pro-Arab.

Another argument given by Jews who wish to dismiss Christian support of Israel is that Christians are doing so because of their theology on the Armageddon wherein Israel will go up in flames, Jews will die en masse, and the saving remnant will recognize Jesus in the Second Coming. Now, I work with Christians and they employ me. I speak at churches. I read their literature. I never hear this.

So why do conservative Christians support Israel? First, they actually believe in the Tanach. So when the Tanach says that the Jews will return to Israel, they actually believe it. It is we Jews that don't believe it. To them it is a confirmation of holy scripture that the Jews went back to the Holy Land.

Secondly, they always quote Genesis: God says to Abraham. "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you." Christians believe that – just as I do. I believe it has been truth throughout history. God has blessed the nations that have blessed the Jews and cursed the nations that have cursed the Jews. It is no coincidence that the country that has most blessed the Jews in history is the most blessed country on Earth; the United States of America. It is also no coincidence that the most anti-Semitism in the world today comes from the most cursed place in the world today: Arab civilization.

American Christians believe that they should support Israel and that America should support democracies against tyrannies. It is a belief that conservatives tend to have. Jews are upset by this and they don't know what to do. The Wall Street Journal is pro-Israel and the New York Times is awful on the Middle East.

What are Jews supposed to do with all of this? The answer is to rethink the biases that led us to certain positions. Think of some of the leaders in America today. Why is George W. Bush so pro-Israel? Is it Texas Jewry? Is it all the Jews who voted for him? Of course not. And why is Dick Cheney so pro-Israel? Was it the Wyoming Jewish Community's influence? Of course not. And why is Condoleezza Rice so pro-Israel? It sure isn't because of her community. The African-American Community is currently the most anti-Semitic minority group in the US.

So, then, why would they all do this, given that they have nothing to gain politically? They support Israel because they are Christians (and because they are conservatives). Another example is British Prime Minister Tony Blair. His party, the Labor Party, is against the war. Tony Blair supported it in large measure because he, too, he is a believing Christian. Jews should learn to realize that God is not an insignificant issue, whether it concerns which Jews send their kids to Israel or which non-Jews support Israel.

Now let's look at the thing American Jews most trusted: the University. Currently, the worst place for Israel in the U.S. is the University. Last week, I spoke at Stanford University. On the front page of the Stanford Daily, it read "Prager Speaks Out Against Anti-Zionism." At the end of the article, it quoted three students who said that they never heard anything like this at Stanford. Stanford is the Harvard of the West and these were new ideas to them. I brought revelatory thought onto their campus by telling them that Anti-Zionism was a morally decayed idea.

Why is the university so morally lopsided? The President of Harvard, Lawrence Summers, gave a speech last year that many of you know about. He said that University is the center of anti-Semitic and anti-Israel sentiment. We had better watch out for this. What Baal was to the Jews in the Bible, getting your kid into college is for Jews in America – a false god.

When I walk around LA, someone will always come up to me because they have heard my radio show. The vast majority of strangers who come over to me shake my hand and tell me that they enjoy my show. But there is one group that goes beyond a greeting and starts to talk about their lives. I can tell by talking to them whether they are a Jew or a Gentile, based on whether they tell me where their kid goes to school. Only Jews do that. In the history of the world, no Gentiles has ever told a stranger where their kids go to college.

Most Jews worship the university. Why we do is a separate subject. But *avodah zarah* is clearly alive and well today. The be all and end all for our kids is what college will they go to, what college are they currently in and what college they went to. Jews are crazy about colleges, but the colleges aren't crazy about us.

All of these issues add to the cognitive dissonance among Jews today. It is time for us to think – and what it comes down to is faith. The non-Jew who believes the Jews are chosen and that the Torah is divine has different outlooks on life, does different things with his children, has different views of Israel, and regards college differently than the non-Jew – and even the Jew – who does not believe. It is a big deal.

In closing, you have enormous influence. That is why it is so important to never forget that God, Torah and Israel are the components of Judaism. Torah and Israel without God are ultimately meaningless and, in my opinion, will lead us in the wrong directions.

## Music in Terezin: an Advocacy of Life

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[Following the presentation of slides (drawings by/of prisoners, printed concert programs, archival and recent photos of Terezin), a recording made by the Nazis in Terezin of Mendelssohn's "Elijah" was played]

Most of the people you have just heard died in Auschwitz. But fortunately, there are numerous survivors who are willing to help us learn more, and understand more, about the Terezin experience. Through their testimonies, and by examining manuscripts, programs, diaries, and other writings from the camp, we can discover what music meant to the inmates.

First of all, it fulfilled normal functions which we associate with music: it was decorative, it entertained, it provided escape, it enriched, it educated. But it quickly turned into something more. In his book *Music in Terezin 1941-1945*, Joza Karas quotes the diary of a teenaged girl, written after a performance of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*:

"When I was walking home and overheard all the small talk about food, black marketing, passes, and work in the fields, I felt like a person having beautiful dreams, who awakens suddenly, and everything is again trite as always. I was thinking all the time about *The Bartered Bride*, and even in my half-slumber I heard [the music] in my head."

I still remember how amazed I was when I first read this. All the basic endeavors of life had become trite in the context of the camp. For this girl, music had become everything. This concept of the importance of art was well articulated in the film *Dead Poets Society*, in which Robin Williams, as a prep school teacher, tells his students that the study of engineering,

business, science, math were necessary for the sustaining of life. The arts represent the reasons for sustaining life.

More than being merely decorative, music represents all that is worthwhile in life. Jean-Jacques van Vlasselaer put it another way. He wrote:

"I believe that culture is born the day a human being becomes conscious of his or her mortality. Meaning originates from the presence of closure. Culture is a means of domesticating closure. The artistic gesture is born when one realizes death is inevitable. A work of art tries to tame death, facing it, braving it, in order to better possess it. Culture affirms our mortal humanity. It is an invented source of life."

Everyone in Terezin did not get to experience the music. But for those who did, this concept of art became so real that survivors consistently refer to music as being more important than food; or they simply say that, in the camp, music was life. Paul Sandfort, a Danish trumpet player who as an inmate played in the Terezin orchestra, related the following during an interview on Norwegian television (and I am deeply indebted to Dr. David Bloch for sharing this with me):

"I remember . . . one of the members from the Concertgebouw Orchestra [in Amsterdam]; he was a second violinist. He was such a modest, very reserved, almost timid man to look at, but one day during one of the rehearsals he suddenly got up and then he played the 'Humoresques' by Dvorak; and he played it with such an empathy, with such an intensity . . . that he put his heart and soul into it . . . He aroused all the fury which the rest of us felt, too, about being suppressed, being locked up, and being in bondage. All that found vent in this, and then he finished the piece and afterwards he was somewhat transfigured.



"The concertmaster applauded, saying, 'you played wonderfully,' and his face brightened in a way. I do not know if he was crying or if he was laughing, but it was as if he, the eternal second violinist had now experienced to obtain recognition, to unfold and play freely, because in music there is freedom, too. We were behind barbed wire and our lives were in danger, and when you were playing music was freedom - the freedom of our feelings, the freedom of our thoughts and feelings, the freedom of spirit, the freedom of culture and spirit - that you cannot, uh - it can live even though you are locked up."

Mr. Sandfort continued, talking about the Nazi propaganda film in which the Terezin orchestra played:

"It is strange that some people think, 'Why did they accept it when they were order by the Germans to do it, as they might have known as well that they were going to die afterwards, because the Germans did not want that . . . afterwards somebody could . . . be a witness who could say that everything was a lie, that the Jews were not that well as it looked in the film at all.' Why do you accept it? It is because you hunger. You do not hunger just for food."

Here, the Norwegian interviewer interrupted him, saying, "The fact that they hungered for food in the camp is understandable. But that they also had a hunger for culture us almost incomprehensible. Can you say anything about that?" So Mr. Sandfort continued:

"I think that this second violinist, whom I mentioned before, that he experienced that life suddenly made sense to him. That it was meant for him so that he could better bear to be sent to Auschwitz to die; he could better cope with his death. And even though [we] talked about food then, the hunger for culture was just as strong, just because we did not have it. We talked about large dinners, but we only had a small crust of bread - but it tasted good. Nowadays

in our society people would let a piece of molded bread, lying in the street, lie. But if you are hungry you pick it up, and then it tastes heavenly. It is like that with music, too, with culture: that when your life really hangs by a thread, then expressing yourself and being able to consume, eat, enjoy, and absorb culture is more important, almost more important than food. And these people - they are certainly - you say that you give your life, your last drop of blood when you produce a work of art - they did that. It was of importance to them.

"I believe that if I had been led into a gas chamber, there would have been a small hole for me, just such a small one which I could have managed through, such a strong vitality I had and such a strength I had - we had - to express ourselves in music or to listen to and absorb others' music, and accept it. And there were no differences in style . . . everything was accepted, also modern music . . ."

So, in Terezin at least, music was not experienced passively. Rather, in the hands of the composers and performers, music became an empowering agent; an agent of hope. In this regard it fulfilled, I think, three specific, active functions. First, music served as witness to their situation. This is especially noticeable in texts of songs like the Slovak folksong "The Rosnov Clock," or the "Four Chinese Songs" of Pavel Haas. These songs bear testimony to how people felt. "The Roznov Clock" text is:

The Roznov clock beats sadly;  
They are taking my beloved away.

But no matter what,  
They will not divide us.

The hour shall come  
When I will get married.

There is a double meaning here, which in other circumstances would seem humorous: the word used for "hour" ("hodinka") also means "hour of death."

The text of one of the Chinese songs is:

Out of the dark sea the moon rises;  
In a country far away the moon also rises now.  
Love mourns its dream; it waits for a far away evening.  
The moon lights my sorrow more brightly.  
I put on my night coat: the hoar frost is cold.  
My hands, how they are empty!  
Sleep, give me a dream about my returning home!  
Sleep, you cannot give me a dream:  
My longing always awakens me.

Second, music stood in judgment. The mere fact that the artists could function at such a high level was a repudiation of Nazism. They were saying, "You can't break our spirit!" The famous Verdi Requiem performances which took place in 1944 provide the best example (here the inmates were able to sing - into the faces of their Nazi tormentors - that a day of judgment awaited).

Third, music guaranteed a future. Not necessarily a "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" future, but one that, in the words of Leos Janacek - here used out of context - "established the certainty of the nation, not on a religious basis, but on a moral one which takes God as its witness." This was accomplished in Terezin through 1) production of all kinds of new music, sometimes containing brief quotes from well-known and significantly grave works, such as Dvorak's *Requiem*, or Suk's *Asrael Symphony* (a special sub-category consisted of the creation and utilization of special barracks songs, newly composed for each children's housing unit, and outfitted secretly with hopeful, anti-Nazi texts); 2) creation of new music for old upbeat folk texts like "The Gnat's Wedding" ("Gnats were getting

married / Didn't have a drop of wine / A lark came / And brought a little bottle"); 3) performance of well-known works such as "The Bartered Bride," "Carmen," "The Marriage of Figaro," "The Creation," "Elijah," and others.

The opera *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* (The Emperor of Atlantis), by Viktor Ullmann and Petr Kien, embodies all three functions. It bears witness to the inmates' situation; it judges the Nazi regime; it provides hope for some kind of honorable continuity. The opera uses a small cabaret orchestra similar to those used in the satirical musical plays of Kurt Weill and Bertold Brecht, and is presented as an allegory. It is a really blistering satire of National Socialism, and, like all good satires, it is occasionally funny.

There are several music quotations in *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*, and four of these are very important: Suk's *Asrael Symphony*, Dvorak's *Requiem*, the (then) German national anthem, *Deutschland ueber alles*, and the famous Lutheran Chorale, *Ein Feste Burg* (A Mighty Fortress Is Our God).

The essential story is simple: the Emperor Ueberall decides that the best way to provide prosperity for Atlantis is to maintain continual war. Death, who has harvested untold millions of souls over thousands of years, so abhors the Emperor's idea that he walks off the job (in fact, the subtitle of the opera is "Death Abdicates"). This creates complete pandemonium - in David Bloch's memorable phrase, "people keep dying but they don't get dead." Finally, Death agrees to go back on the job only if the Emperor will be his first client. The Emperor agrees, order is restored, and a final chorale is sung (*Ein Feste Burg*), fitted with new, astringent (purifying?) harmonies and placed in 3/4 time, which completely rids the tune of its otherwise martial character. Petr Kien's text for this is:

Come, Death, our worthy, honored guest,  
 Into our hearts descending,  
 Lift all life's burdens from our breast,  
 Lead us to rest, our sorrows ending.  
 Make us prize all human worth;

To other lives awaken.  
Let this commandment be our truth  
The great and sovereign name of Death  
Must not be lightly taken!

This is an incredible conclusion because, in the end, the Emperor and the victims experience the same redemption, thus lending an element of reconciliation to the work. There is also here another message, but there is no way to know if it was planned by the composer and librettist. Just after the dress rehearsal (attended by one of Terezin's high ranking Nazis), the composer, librettist, and most cast members were sent to Auschwitz where most of them perished. But, just perhaps, had the culturally assimilated Terezin audience gotten to hear *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*, some might also have remembered the final verse of Martin Luther's original chorale text, as it ends Bach's famous cantata, *Ein Feste Burg*:

God's word shall be our only plan,  
Our only compensation.  
He only, in his bounty  
Can deliver our foundation.  
Were they to take our life,  
Land, limb, child and wife,  
Ignore ye the horde,  
They shall have no reward.  
God's realm will be within us.

[The presentation at the Cantors Assembly ended with unrehearsed singing, by all in attendance, of *Ani Maanim*, in remembrance of its use by Auschwitz inmates as they were taken to execution; a performance by three cantors of Gideon Klein's *Bachuri lean tisa*; and a performance by inmates of Kreuzburg Civilian Internment Camp of *Go Down Moses*, as recorded in 1943 by Swedish Radio. A brief question and answer period followed.]

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## Homosexuality and the Conservative Movement

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Of the four movements in modern Judaism – Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform – it is only within the Conservative movement that debate on issues of homosexuality continues unabated. The other movements have taken their stands long ago.

The Orthodox stand solidly against any form of homosexual sex. The most liberal among Orthodox rabbis point out that while homosexual sex remains prohibited – indeed, an “abomination,” in the words of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 – Jews who violate that prohibition remain Jews. They are just sinning Jews – but, of course, we are all sinning Jews. Nobody is perfect; nobody abides by all of the commandments flawlessly. That is why we ask God’s forgiveness three times each day in our prayers and that is why we have the High Holy Day season to focus on repentance and forgiveness. As an “abomination” though, homosexual sex happens to be a particularly egregious violation. Therefore those who find themselves with homoerotic tendencies should seek to get help to reverse that, if possible, and have heterosexual sex within marriage. Those who cannot do that should abstain from sex altogether.

Of course, among the Orthodox, as among every group, the official policy does not always correspond with reality. A recent magazine article and a recent film speak openly about gays and lesbians who are Orthodox Jews, and there is an organization of gay and lesbian graduates of Orthodox *yeshivot* (day schools) and even two websites for people who find themselves to be both Orthodox and gay.<sup>7</sup> All of this, of course, is a source

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<sup>7</sup>. Naomi Grossman, “The Gay Orthodox Underground,” *Moment Magazine*, April 2001. The movie is “Trembling Before God.” The organization referred to is the Gay and Lesbian Yeshiva Day School Alumni Association (GLYDSA). The websites are [www.glydsa.com](http://www.glydsa.com) and [www.orthogays.com](http://www.orthogays.com).

of consternation among the Orthodox leadership, for in theory no such things should exist. The phenomenon of Orthodox gays and lesbians is also a source of consternation to the gays and lesbians themselves, for their very existence is an anathema – and openly proclaimed as such – in the synagogues they love and in the form of Jewish belief and practice they cherish. That has led a high percentage of them to leave Orthodoxy, albeit with misgivings. Those who stay either hide their homosexual identity or find the strength to live with the inherent contradiction and the constant slurs they experience.

On the other end of the spectrum, the Reform movement – and the small Reconstructionist movement (representing about 2% of America's affiliated Jews) – also made their decisions about this matter long ago. Already in 1973 the synagogue arm of the Reform movement opened its ranks to synagogues with specific outreach to gays and lesbians when it accepted such a synagogue, Beit Hayyim Hadashim in Los Angeles, as a member. That did not come without controversy; indeed, a heated symposium among some of the rabbis of the movement appeared in their journal, the *CCAR (Central Conference of American Rabbis) Journal*. In the early 1980s, the Reconstructionist seminary, after some heated discussions of its own, accepted homosexuals to its rabbinical program, and Hebrew Union College, the seminary of the Reform movement, did likewise in the late 1980s. All of these actions, of course, do not mean that homophobia is absent in these movements and that gays and lesbians ordained by these institutions find rabbinic positions as easily as their straight colleagues. Still, these movements both officially and largely in practice have decided that here, as often, they will not see traditional Jewish law as binding and will act instead on their current moral convictions.

It is within the Conservative movement that the debate continues. In part, that is to be expected just by virtue of the fact that the Conservative movement is the one in the middle, feeling the pulls of both sides. When one digs deeper, one finds ideological reasons for the ambivalence. On the one hand, Conservative ideology states that Jewish law is binding, and so

the verses in Leviticus cannot easily be dismissed. Judaism, of course, is based not only on the Torah but on the way the rabbis over the generations have interpreted and applied it, and so many verses in the Torah no longer apply in their straightforward meaning.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, some, like the law stating that a "stubborn and rebellious son" is to be executed and that the death penalty is to be applied for a whole gamut of crimes have been effectively read out of existence through rabbinic restrictions on their meaning and applicability,<sup>9</sup> and all biblical laws are subject to the specific scope and meaning that the Rabbis gave them. In this case, however, the Rabbis interpreted the verses in Leviticus to apply to all male homosexual sex, regardless of form or context, and the Rabbis expanded this prohibition to apply to lesbians as well.<sup>10</sup> Thus there is not much "wiggle room" in the tradition itself to produce a liberal stance on homosexual sex.

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<sup>8</sup>. For a description of the rabbinic process and the justifications for rabbinic authority to determine the meaning and scope of biblical texts, see Elliot N. Dorff and Arthur Rosett, *A Living Tree: The Roots and Growth of Jewish Law* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), chapters 4-6.

<sup>9</sup>. The biblical laws on the stubborn and rebellious son: Deuteronomy 21:18-21. After restricting the meaning and applicability of this law in numerous ways, the Talmud itself says that the "stubborn and rebellious son" referred to by the Torah "never was and never will be!" See Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 71a. After placing a host of evidentiary restrictions on the death penalty, the Mishnah ultimately states that a court that fulfilled all these rules and issued a capital sentence once in seven years was a "bloody court," and there are those who apply that description to a court that decrees a capital sentence once in 70 years. Mishnah, *Makkot* 1:10. On the other hand, the Rabbis also had the authority to add substantially to the Torah's laws, and they did just that, for example, with regard to the Sabbath laws – so much so that they themselves say that "The laws of the Sabbath...are like mountains hanging by a hair, for they consist of little Bible and many laws." Mishnah, *Haggigah* 1:8.

<sup>10</sup>. The Rabbis' prohibition of lesbian sex: *Sifra*, "Aharei Mot," 9:5 on Leviticus 18:3. See B. *Yevamot* 76a, where Rav Huna categorizes lesbian relations as biblically forbidden intercourse and Rava instead sees such relations as "simple lewdness" and therefore only rabbinically forbidden, so that a lesbian would still be eligible to marry a *kohen* (priest, descendant of Aaron). The Rabbis' prohibition of all gay sex: Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 7:4; Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 54a; Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* 1:14.



On the other hand, though, unlike the Orthodox, Conservative Jews study the Jewish tradition – including its laws – in their historical context. Sometimes the scientific, social, economic, or moral conditions are relevantly different from what they were when a particular law, judicial ruling, or custom became normative, in some cases the rabbis of the current generation find those differences to be sufficient to warrant a different ruling. “The times have changed” has been used long before the modern, Conservative movement to justify changes in the law, but the Conservative movement has shown more willingness than the Orthodox to use that traditional rationale for change in such matters as the place of women in Jewish liturgy and law and in applying Jewish law to modern medical technologies. Whether liberal, contemporary moral evaluations of homosexuality in some parts of American society should influence Jewish law as we practice it in our time as well is, to put it mildly, an issue on which the Conservative movement has agreed to disagree.

The situation is not quite as chaotic as the last paragraph might suggest. A resolution adopted in May 1990 by the Rabbinical Assembly, the organization of Conservative rabbis, and virtually the same resolution adopted in November 1991, by the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism stated the points in which the movement is pretty much at one:<sup>11</sup>

### Gay and Lesbian Jews

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<sup>11</sup>. The discussion began in the mid-1980s, and it evolved into the resolution of the Rabbinical Assembly quoted here in May 1990. A similar, subsequent resolution was adopted in November 1991, by the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the Conservative Movement's synagogue arm. The United Synagogue resolution uses the same language as the Rabbinical Assembly resolution that preceded it, but it leaves out the fifth “Whereas” clause and the fourth resolution of the Rabbinical Assembly version. Still, the substance and actual wording of the bulk of the United Synagogue resolution is the same as the fuller, Rabbinical Assembly version reproduced here from *1990 Rabbinical Assembly Proceedings* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 1990), p. 275.

WHEREAS Judaism affirms that the Divine image reflected by every human being must always be cherished and affirmed, and

WHEREAS Jews have always been sensitive to the impact of official and unofficial prejudice and discrimination, wherever directed, and

WHEREAS gay and lesbian Jews have experienced not only the constant threats of physical violence and homophobic rejection, but also the pains of anti-Semitism known to all Jews and, additionally, a sense of painful alienation from our own religious institutions, and

WHEREAS the extended families of gay and lesbian Jews are often members of our congregations who live with concern for the safety, health, and well-being of their children, and

WHEREAS the AIDS crisis has deeply exacerbated the anxiety and suffering of this community of Jews who need in their lives the compassionate concern and support mandated by Jewish tradition,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that we, The Rabbinical Assembly [or the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism], while affirming our tradition's prescription for heterosexuality,

- 1) Support full civil equality for gays and lesbians in our national life, and
- 2) Deplore the violence against gays and lesbians in our society, and
- 3) Reiterate that, as are all Jews, gay men and lesbians are welcome as members in our congregations, and
- 4) Call upon our synagogues and the arms of our movement to increase our awareness, understanding and concern for our fellow Jews who are gay and lesbian.

The Conservative Movement, then, as a movement, stands on record for full civil rights for gays and lesbians and for protection from attack and discrimination. It also officially welcomes gays and lesbians, as it welcomes all Jews, to Conservative congregations. Serious disagreement

continues within the movement, however, on two issues: admission of gays and lesbians to rabbinical and cantorial schools, and the advisability of creating and using some kind of commitment ceremony for gay or lesbian couples. The very name of such ceremonies is a matter at issue. Options include "commitment ceremony;" *brit re'im* (covenant of friends) or *brit re'im ha-ahuvim* (covenant of loving friends), based on the description of the couple in the seven blessings for a heterosexual marriage; and marriage or the Hebrew equivalents, *kiddushin* (betrothal) and *nisu'in* (marriage). The liturgy for such ceremonies is also at issue, ranging from ceremonies very close to Jewish marriage rites to those very different from that.

While the Conservative movement at this writing officially endorses neither ordination or commitment ceremonies, some Conservative rabbis on their own authority as rabbis have performed ceremonies joining same-sex couples, and the Conservative Movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards has deferred any further action on this question until it can learn from a longer span of experience with such ceremonies. Moreover, some openly gay and lesbian rabbis serve in a variety of posts within the synagogues and schools of the Conservative Movement. Thus the debate goes on.

When the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards extensively debated homosexuality in 1991-1992, I suggested that this matter is, at least to some extent, a generational matter. I personally never heard of the word "homosexual," let alone "gay" or "lesbian," as I was growing up in the 1950s. In my freshman year of college (1961) one of the books we read as part of a required great books course was Plato's *Symposium*, in which Socrates lauds homosexual sex between a master and student as an appropriate expression of that relationship. We tittered about that for two days without serious discussion about homosexuality and then moved on to the next book on the syllabus.

It was not until 1973 that I next was confronted with this topic. I was already teaching at the University of Judaism, and an old camp friend who

had become a rabbi of a synagogue in Cleveland called. He told me that a fellow who had been a member of his congregation, regional president of United Synagogue Youth, and then a student at the Joint Program between Columbia University and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America had come out as a gay man during the spring of his sophomore year, had been shunned by the Seminary community at that time and had transferred to UCLA. The rabbi asked me to meet with this young man just to reassure him that people in the Jewish community still cared about him. When I did that, I experienced the first and only time that I felt genuinely embarrassed by my tradition. All I knew about Judaism and homosexuality was the verses in Leviticus, but he, for understandable reasons, had done considerable research on the topic as it had been treated in the later Jewish tradition. He also described to me what it was like being a committed Jew and yet condemned by his own tradition. I do not know what happened to him, and I hope that in the three hours we spent that afternoon, I at least conveyed a sense of sympathy and support, but I am afraid that I was dumbfounded by what he told me and did not have much to say to allay his feelings of rejection by his own tradition.

Because I specialize in bioethics, when the AIDS virus was identified in 1981, I found myself on an AIDS task force at UCLA Medical Center. Since the disease as it first manifested itself in North America disproportionately infected gay men, I came to know a number of gays during those years and ultimately served on the board of directors of Nehamah: The Jewish AIDS Project of Los Angeles. It is hard to fear or hate a group of people when you get to know them and discover that, as a group, they are just as intelligent, moral, and Jewishly committed as straight Jews are.

In the meantime, I noticed that my teenage children in the 1980s had a very different experience with this whole topic than the one that I had had. They knew a number of openly gay classmates at school and it did not seem to faze them. Their attitude was simple: some people are straight, and some are gay, much that same as the fact that some people have blue eyes and others have brown eyes. They just took it, in other words, as a fact of life.

It was in right in the middle of the four meetings of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (in December 1992) that our daughter told my wife and me that she is a lesbian. As a graduate student in the midst of a doctoral program in psychology, she knew how to present this well -- in a calm way, with a description of how she gradually came to know this about herself lest we think that she was jumping to conclusions, with openness to all of our questions, and with some books for us to read. I was very glad then that I had done some serious thinking about this issue before she told us; I honestly do not know how well I would have reacted without that previous experience and thinking. I am also glad that I had formulated my stance on the matter before she came out to us so that I could rest assured in my own mind that my stance was not just a case of special pleading. Over the years since then, what I have learned from her and from many other gays and lesbians has only added to the pool of evidence for the liberal stance that I have taken on this issue. Indeed, it is precisely the testimony of gays and lesbians themselves that convinced me in the first place and now I have my own experience as a parent of a lesbian to add to what I have heard from others.

Even some of my rabbinic colleagues who have taken a more traditional stance on this issue have told me that their own children see the matter very differently. The science on the etiology of homosexuality is still soft; the most reliable evidence still comes from homosexuals themselves. That evidence is unquestionably reliable because no sane person would intentionally subject himself or herself to the discrimination that contemporary society still heaps upon homosexuals. The only evidence that appears to be quite definite, as affirmed now for close to thirty years by the American Psychiatric Association, is that psychiatric interventions to try to change a homosexual's sexual orientation not only do not work; they are actually harmful, making the homosexual feel even worse about herself or himself and contributing to the horrendous statistics of suicide among homosexuals.

Aristotle long ago pointed out that it is folly to seek certainty in those areas where certainty cannot reasonably be expected.<sup>12</sup> So as the science develops, perhaps the proper stance at this time is precisely what the Conservative movement has taken -- namely, to affirm our commitment to the tradition while at the same time recognizing that as the scientific studies and personal anecdotes increase, we should be continually open to reevaluating the traditional position. In the meantime, even though I have been in the forefront in arguing for liberalization of our policy on commitment ceremonies (marriages) and ordination, this Conservative rabbi thinks that the current Conservative position is correct for its time and audience in not disallowing either the traditional stance or the liberal one, enabling all of us to continue the discussion with respect as we agree to disagree.

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<sup>12</sup>. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapter 3, 1094b12-28: "Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions, any more than in all the products of the crafts. Now fine and just actions, which political science investigates, admits of much variety and fluctuation of opinion, so that they may be thought to exist only by convention, and not by nature. And goods also give rise to a similar fluctuation because they bring harm to many people; for before now men have been undone by reason of their wealth, and others by reason of their courage. We must be content, then, in speaking of such subjects and with such premises to indicate the truth roughly and in outline, and in speaking about things which are only for the most part true and with premises of the same kind to reach conclusions that are not better. In the same spirit, therefore, should each type of statement be *received*; for it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits; it is evidently equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs."

## Presidential Installation Speech

Hazzan Jacob Ben-Zion Mendelson

In 1987, I was invited to the former Soviet Union to lead prayer services at the Choral Main Synagogue in Moscow. I will never forget the six *meshorerim* who encircled me on the *Bimah*. They ranged in age from 75 to 95, each of them wore a gown, a *tallit* and a cantor's hat. I gave them nicknames. One of them was Kwartin, one Hershman, one Rosenblatt, etc. Their posture on the *bimah* indicated an intense pride in what they were doing. Each of their hats had a pom-pom on top.

I first saw the cantor hats in my house while growing up. My brother, who was already a full-fledged Hazzan when I was six, had a collection of them. I remember him looking in the mirror and posing wearing the *midor* at various rakish angles. At 10, I wore my first hat. It was cool. I was a *vi-male* boy - raise your hand if you know what I am talking about (sing *vi-male*). Every *shabbos*, my congregation sings it as I put the Torah on the *shulchan*.

I started going to Cantors Assembly Conventions before I could walk. My Uncle Nechemyah was President when I was 6, my dad, who was proud of his kid brother, wore a badge that said "*meyvin*." It was a time when you could share an elevator with Pinchik, when you could hear Alter and Ganchoff arguing about Ukrainian dorian nusach in the shvitz and when Barkan would be holding court while chain smoking Camels. This was the world of *chazzunis*; it was in the air! (make noise)

Fast forward to today. From the standpoint of liturgical Jewish music, we live in interesting times and that's not necessarily bad. Paralleling other moments in Jewish musical history, the home culture is asserting itself. This could be a problem or an opportunity. Let's take control of the situation and do the right thing. We all know what to do; we embrace the new, while preserving and respecting tradition. If we do that, we'll create a *davening* modality for today that acknowledges and respects yesterday.

Six million Jewish souls who had *freigish*, *adonay malach*, and Ukrainian *dorian* imbedded in their consciousness were snuffed out. We will not let their music die along with them.

We, as an organization, have come an amazingly long way because of the efforts and dedication of people like our officer corps, whom I am proud and lucky to serve with.

To SHELDON LEVIN, our outgoing President. I am inspired by your capability, your work ethic, your honesty and sense of righteousness. I hope I can begin to measure up to you.

To STEVEN STOEHR. Once upon a time, I was your teacher. Now there's a lot that I can learn from you. You are the prototype of what a modern cantor should be; one that embraces change and loves tradition.

To JOEY GOLE, one of my dearest personal friends. We share a passion for *chazzunis* and each other. I always learn from you.

To JACK CHOMSKY. Your brilliant leadership qualities were evident when you led us to Israel. We all felt ten feet tall because of you.

To DAVID PROPIS. Your lethal combination of brilliant talent and organizational skills are so evident in our fabulously successful CD Project with United Synagogue.

To NANCY ABRAMSON. What a great moment for all of us! *ZEH HAYOM!* Your extraordinary leadership skills were on display in Washington. Your Jewish musical journey has taken you from the *zamir choralle* to the Park Avenue Synagogue. *B'ruchah haba'ah.*

To ABRAHAM B. SHAPIRO. Your fierce dedication to your beloved Assembly leaves us all in awe. Kind of like your dedication to your beloved Millie. May both *shidduchim* endure *ad mea veesrim.*



To STEVE STEIN. I've seen you up close and personal over the last two years and *CHEVRE*, this is a combination of *menchlechkeit* and talent that mere words cannot describe. I treasure your friendship and counsel.

What advice can I offer you my dear colleagues? I've been doing this full time since 1966 (I told the conservative synagogue of Riverdale that I was 20, when I was really just 19). Here is what I've learned:

- There is no defense; only offense.
- You have to do it yourself.
- You must nurture and study your instrument. My Rebbe Alter had it right when he said that you need three things to be a chazz'n: Voice, Voice and Voice.
- You must get along with your rabbinic partner.
- Make it happen.
- You must love your congregation (oy the Jews): This is not a job; it's a calling.
- We must support each other proactively.
- In matters of Placement, we must be impeccable. We can't wait for other arms of the Movement to be in perfect synch with us to remember; no defense, only offense.

In short, WE MUST BE EXCELLENT! Excellent in everything we do from teaching to singing to pastoring to speaking to computer. We must strive for excellence.

Cantors are a wonderful breed. I love to be around *chazzonim*; they have heart. They have *ta'am*. Can you imagine calling a Faith Steinsnyder, asking her for help and she says no? It can't happen! We all love to help each other. Don't be ashamed to ask one another for help.

Excellence.

A few personal words before I close. I miss my friends that are gone that came up this profession with me: Abe Levitt, Abe Weissman, Ed Fogel, and Jay Corn. I miss you guys awful bad.

To Robert Kieval. *Refuah shelemah*. Love.

I'd like to acknowledge the four chairs of this fabulous convention:

- To Nate Lam, who along with Donna, adopted me for a month back in 1991, when I had some serious surgery. I love you.
- To Joey Gole, who is the *chazz'n* of a *shul* with an indoor parking lot. I love you.
- To Chayim Frenkel who took my picture with Billy Crystal. Thank you. I love you *meng*.
- To Don Gurney. We go back a long way...please, negotiate for me. I love you.
- A special word of thanks to Jay, Shannon, and the Management Committee for their tireless efforts.

To Erik Anjou, the director and producer of *Chazz'n*. It's been an amazing journey. Allow me to be so bold to say that what you are about to experience will knock your socks off. The potential of this film to raise the consciousness about *Chazanut* to a mass audience is staggering. It's great to be directed by a man whose main goal in life is to lead *shachris* at B.J. Love

To Don Roberts who, with perseverance, talent and love, changed my life. After studying with every major voice teacher in New York, it is ironic and sweet that my friend of 38 years took me from darkness to light.

To Rabbi Neil Zuckerman, President Mark Bieler and all the members of Temple Israel Center who so honored me by making this trip. I am so grateful for your support. I wish such *balabatim* on all of my colleagues. I wish my beloved friend, Gordon Tucker, would be here by my side, but riding a bike in Hertzeliyah is more important to him.

To my brother Sol. Tucky, you are the reason I became a *chazz'n*. I still hear your voice in my head when I *daven*. I am forever grateful. I love you.

To my sister, Betty. I'm so grateful that you made the trip. Now that you are the matriarch. I must listen to everything you say.

I acknowledge my mother and father, whose presence permeates this moment. Mom and Dad, you dreamt a dream which later became my own.

To my mom, Ruth. Your support of me is so heartwarming. You see, she may not have married the dentist, but she did good. Love

Danny

Fredda

Several weeks ago, I was asked to sing at the HUC Graduation. After rehearsal and dinner with the students, one of them asked me if I brought my cantors hat!